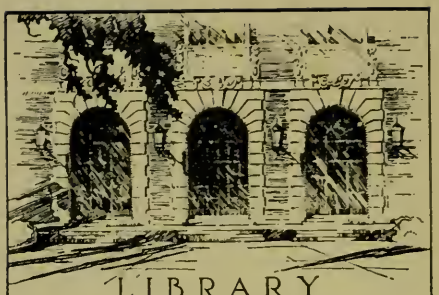

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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS;

A TALE OF THE YEAR 1830.

What gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
When Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train
Garters, and Stars and Coronets appear,
And in soft sounds "Your Grace" salutes the ear!

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,
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1831.

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C. Whiting, Beaufort House, Strand.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

Euphémon.—Il aura mes biens aujourd'hui ;
Et son ainé n'aura pour tout partage
Que le courroux d'un père qu'il outrage
Il le mérite ; il fut dénaturé.
Rondon.—Ah ! vous l'aviez trop longtems enduré.
L'autre du moins agit avec prudence,
Mais cet ainé, quels traits d'extravagance !
L'Enfant Prodigue.

Lady Maria Willingham was a person who, with indifferent features, had always managed to be called pretty; with very moderate abilities, had maintained the reputation of being extremely clever; and with a narrow selfish heart, was continually cited as the most excellent woman in the world. The tact which had thus universally enabled her to assume a virtue where she had it not, was of course a qualification of no feeble force. Early in her fashion-

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able career it had whispered to her, that a dress of the last new Parisian mode was an admirable mask for the body; an earnest, and deliberate, and mysterious tone of conversation, a most imposing cloak for the deficiencies of the mind: and she was well aware that *the heart* is usually taken upon the trust of these preceding and more ostensible endowments. She therefore confined the demonstrations of her virtue to a refrainment from all sins unrecognised as of the highest *ton;* and to a pathetic vibration of the head and elevation of the eyes, whenever the delinquencies of other people came under discussion.

In one respect Lady Maria had appeared to rise superior to her own failings, and to have suffered a remission of her callous egotism;—she had made what is called *a love match.* But love, like other sad dogs with an ill name, is rendered responsible for many a crime, in addition to his own unjustifiable criminalities; and if ever Cupid could have proved his innocence by an *alibi,* it was most assuredly in the instance of Charles Willingham's elopement with Lady Maria De Vesci! I have already asserted

that she was neither handsome, clever, nor amiable. At the period of what was termed her "rash marriage," she was nearly five and twenty, with a portion of three thousand pounds, Irish currency; and attached, as a Bath and Cheltenham appendage, to a deaf mother, the dullest Dowager extant throughout the united realms of Great Britain.

At Ramsgate, where, through her qualification of "ladyship," Lady Maria maintained a very creditable degree of ball-room precedency, the De Vescis became acquainted with Mr. Willingham, the eldest son of a family of opulence and county antiquity. He was fresh from college, or rather, he had still a term and a degree in prospective endurance; being three years younger than the fair tactician from Bruton-street, who had brought the faded looks and blighted hopes of another infructuous season to be repaired by the breezes of the Isle of Thanet. After dancing, riding, walking, and flirting together, with the assiduity becoming a watering place, Charles Willingham very properly fell in love, and Lady Maria very naturally fell into a fit of musing. She considered

that her lady-mother was paralytic, that her lordly brother and his wife were far gone in severe evangelism, that her prospects were extremely precarious, and her means most unaristocratically limited; and in consequence of these lamentable coincidences, she thought it on the whole advisable to sigh and grow sentimental in honour of poor Charles and his honest passion; and to sanction with her smiles his application to his father for a maintenance, and to her own maternal Countess Dowager for her hand.

Unfortunately the replies of both were unpropitious. Sir Claude Willingham, having a favourite second son, was by no means anxious for the early marriage of his heir apparent, and consequently restricted his promise of an income for the young couple to a thousand a year; and on the receipt of this almost interdictory intelligence, the Dowager, whose head had been shaking for years past with the palsy, redoubled its movement in negative vehemence. "*Her* consent to such a miserable match for her dear Maria? Never!" She could not hear of it with patience.

Like other stupid old women, poor Lady De Vesci, however, contrived to defeat her own views on the subject. At all times a bore of the most stupendous magnitude, she grew thrice doubly tiresome under the irritations of the disaster which threatened her domestic peace. She concentrated all her prose into ceaseless diatribes against the folly and wickedness of improvident marriages, and the thriftless frivolity of the young men of the age; and she insisted on keeping her superannuated kitten perpetually under her own eye, in a stifling Ramsgate parlour—enlivened only by an elaborate effort in lambswool knitting, and the daily lecture of the Globe newspaper. Lady Maria had been long compelled to evening casino;—it was now hinted as a morning recreation, by way of sedative. In vain did Charles Willingham languish on the pier, and mope upon the cliffs; her Ladyship was secluded as strictly as a nun of any sisterhood in Spain. He fixed his gaze upon the daily airings of the Dowager's chariot, and indited a sonnet thereupon; then thought of the Cambridge horrors of his ensuing term, until his grief absolutely expanded itself into

elegiac stanzas! Both effusions, accompanied by an epistle in simple prose far more to the purpose, he bribed towards the dressing table of Lady Maria; who, having no feelings of filial reluctance to subdue, finally ceded to the united influence of three such tender missives; and to escape from a dreary home and beggarly prospects, ran away with him on the following morning, and was always said to have perpetrated a love-match!—So much for the judgment of the world!—

The young couple did not long persist in their undutiful alienation from the heads of their respective and respected houses; for they had not a guinea wherewith to maintain the dignity of their "truant disposition." Lady Maria, an expert and insinuating pen-woman, soon prompted an exculpatory, but very submissive epistle from her husband to Sir Claude; and despatched another from her own fair hand to the Dowager, such as would have done honour to the sensibilities of any Araminta or Adeliza in any novel throughout the lachrymose range of Lane and Newman's shelves; yet in defiance of the epistolary eloquence of both, no

answer was returned to either! Affairs now became pressing. Even Charles Willingham's buoyant spirits failed to sustain themselves against the depressing spectacle of an empty purse and an increasing file of bills; and Lady Maria, by no means prepared to endure with patience the exigencies commonly consequent upon "a love match," considerately proposed that their sole remaining five pound note should convey them in a chaise and pair to Bruton-street.

According to the most approved precedents, the butler and footman were bribed—the forbidden door clandestinely opened—and the "penitent wanderer," with disordered tresses, rushed to the feet of the purblind Dowager, who was obliged to put on her spectacles ere she could recognize the discarded offspring of her bosom. Lady Maria Willingham delivered her tale—whether unvarnished or not—with her accustomed plausible deliberation. She wept much, and expostulated not at all; dilating upon the deep remorse of her self-accusing filial tenderness; and including Lady De Vesci's favourite maid, her asthmatic pug—ay!—and

even her Penelope's web of lambswool, among the affecting reminiscences of her repentance. The Dowager, touched by so intimate a combination of domestic images, contented her righteous rage by the bitterest vituperation against the seducer of her innocent child; and before six o'clock the *trio* was seated at dinner together, in the friendly intimacy of her Ladyship's stuffy boudoir—a reeking sudatorium, past the ascertainment of Réaumur or Fahrenheit.

Fortified by this encouragement, Mr. Willingham addressed a second letter to Heddeston Court; and Sir Claude was at length moved—and if by the spirit, by a very angry one—to favour his penitent heir with a definitive answer; acquainting him that the allowance of a thousand a year originally promised, would be limited to five hundred, in consequence of the indecent disregard he had shown to public opinion, and to the long established respectability of his family. Sir Claude then digressed into a confession of his own political and religious faith, and an *obligato* flourish in honour of Church and State, with which he was so much in the habit of embellishing his county addresses

and electioneering clap-traps, that he found it difficult to put pen to paper without indulging in its cut-and-dried pomposities.

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Lady Maria, as she thrust the epistle into its franked envelope, and threw it on the dressing-table. "This letter is the announcement of our ruin!"

"Nay! dear Maria, do not let us look upon the dark side of things. Your mother has pressingly invited us to make her house our home, and we need therefore consider this niggardly allowance as only present pocket money."

"A home! Yes! and a charming home it is; stifled with sick lap-dogs, a tribe of toad eaters, and their nightly card table,—and stunned from morning till night with the monotonous shrieks of a peevish parrot!"

"Dearest Maria! recollect for a moment the affectionate interest with which you used to talk to me at Ramsgate of the attractions of your beloved home!"

Lady Maria shrugged her shoulders.

"And of your duties towards the declining age of an excellent parent! All these may

be now fulfilled; and lightened—may I not say so, dearest love?—by the companionship of a person faithfully and fondly attached to you."

"And even suppose, Charles, that we *do* resign ourselves to the slavery of boring on with mamma, she cannot live for ever; and I know Liniment has long thought her in a very declining way."

Young Willingham was rather shocked by this light allusion to the death of a parent, who, despite her foible for sick lap-dogs and loo-playing toadies, was still *a parent;*—but it was uttered by the lips of his dearest Maria, and he forgave it.

"Liniment may be mistaken; and whenever the melancholy event really takes place, you will of course derive some slight advantages from Lady De Vesci's will, to replace her present kindness and generosity."

"Advantages! you are quite mistaken. Advantages! not a shilling! My mother has nothing but her jointure—has not saved a guinea, to my certain knowledge; and my brother will do nothing for me beyond the regular payment of my miserable pittance. What a prospect!"

"You have always told me," said Willingham, unwittingly, "that you were totally ignorant of the state of Lady De Vesci's affairs, and that your brother had often spoken of increasing your provision."

"Did I? You take things so literally! At all events nothing can be more literal and positive than *your* father's letter; and nothing more certain than that till the death of Sir Claude, we have nothing to do but to starve on six hundred a year."

"*Certain?* By no means! We must contrive, dearest Maria, that he should see you; that he should become acquainted with all your excellent and endearing qualities, and I am convinced that he will not persist in his opposition. My father, although a valetudinarian, was formerly esteemed one of the most polished men in England, and he is quite capable of appreciating your elegant mind and manners. Besides, love, supposing our income to be limited for a time, our ultimate prospects are secured by a strict entail; and then, how often have you assured me that competence with the man you love—"

"Competence?—absurd!—Charles, Charles, do not deceive yourself with set phrases. What you call competence, I call penury. However, it is too late to think about it now. Six hundred a-year!—Heigho!"

And "heigho!" echoed the mortified Willingham, as he left the room, and consoled himself with the companionship of Lady De Vesci's fretful parrot; whose "set phrases" he began to think, for the first time, preferable to those of his own dearest Maria.

Her Ladyship's prognostications, however, whether couched in set or random phrases, were strictly fulfilled. Lady De Vesci gradually dowagered away; every east wind filled her affectionate daughter with alarm; and not Pope himself could have "rocked the cradle of declining age" with a more tremulous solicitude than that which was instigated by Lady Maria's dread of forfeiture of her mother's handsome establishment and comfortable table. She was held up as a mirror of filial imitation to their remiss offspring by every Dowager throughout the parishes of St. George and St. James. Nobody, indeed, could be more assiduously expert

in placing the gorgeous Indian screen impervious to a draught; nobody more accurately versed in the mysteries of chicken-panada! But all would not do. In spite of her watchful vigilance, in spite of Liniment's co-operative care, poor paralytic Lady De Vesci died in the agitation of her first grandchild's first tooth. I say *grandchild* in all its neutral indefinity; because I am unwilling to admit, that a person so provident as Lady Maria Willingham, could have been guilty of producing a *daughter* in utter disregard of the Heddeston Court entail!

A daughter, however, it was; and before its discontented mother had recovered the horrible crisis of her ejection from the comfortable domicile of Bruton-street, which now, by a reminiscent figure of speech, became once more "her beloved home;" before she had tamed down her endurance to her damp cottage at Chiswick, and the tough roast mutton which forms the legitimate nutriment of a love match, *a second* came to magnify the sum total of her disasters! Two little Miss Willinghams in less than three years;—and Charles pretending to be so fond of them too—just by way of contradiction!

The budding of this second female olive branch, meanwhile, determined Mr. Willingham to make a second appeal to his father's liberality; but as he had formerly prospered so ill in his written manifesto of misfortune, he resolved, in the present instance, to try the effect of *viva voce* solicitation. Having considerably improved in familiar tactics under Lady Maria's tuition, he had become aware that it is much easier to *write* "no" than to say it, particularly to one's own and eldest son. He put himself accordingly into the mail; and just as daylight began to glimmer over the goodly hop-grounds of the county of Kent, he alighted at the Three Fiddlers, the highly unpoetical ensign of the inn at Heddeston, the family at the court being much too ancient, and too highly established, to seek or endure the vulgar propitiation of "the Willingham Arms" in their own especial and feudal village.

Poor Charles had many sufferings to undergo in this retreat of rural indulgence, besides the company of the exciseman and tax-gatherer, the perfumes of punch and tobacco, and the gritty tenure of a sanded floor, which he had

patiently anticipated. After a due encounter with the respectful recognition of the tap-room and its presidency, he had to learn that he was pretty universally regarded as a disgraced and exherited member of the house of Willingham; while his younger brother, who, by a precipitate union with the daughter of his private tutor, had certainly "defied the opinion of the world, and outraged the prejudices of his family," in a degree far more flagrant than that of his own delinquencies—was comfortably settled under his father's roof-tree, with a full and unlimited dominion over park and chase, cellar and buttery, treasury and rent-roll, throughout the liberties of Heddeston and its court! Mine host of the Fiddlers naturally accompanied this advertisement of mischance with the ancient and appropriate saw, which forbids one man to look over a gate, and permits another to abduct the steed from its pasture; and poor Charles was fain to admit the plausibility of the dictum.

But Mr. Willingham had not journeyed sixty miles to content himself with the philosophy of a village hostel. It is written that "there are

more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in" even that of the Danish Horatio; and Charles earnestly trusted that there might be consolations in store for him in his father's mansion, beyond the conjectures of the tap-room of the Fiddlers. Accordingly, after the performance of certain tonsorial, lavatorial, and masticatorial duties, he set forward upon his humiliating errand; and arrived at the lodge of Heddeston Court in a plight but ill becoming the heir of all its dignities. He found himself, however, warmly, and even affectionately, welcomed by the old retainers of the house; to whom the remembrance of his boyish inconsideration remained the more precious, from the contrast it afforded with Mr. Joseph's parsimonious habits and chilling reserve. Dependents are more frequently attached to us by our failings than by our virtues.

Charles Willingham was conscious of a painful thrill of reminiscence on entering the old hall. It was very early; none but the domestics were yet astir; yet, even among these, he found himself greeted by a far more eager burst of sympathy than had been personally

bestowed upon him since his departure from his hereditary home. Lady Maria was an iceberg, compared with the old housekeeper who had formerly officiated as his nurse; and the tears which graced the eyes of the old steward, the butler, and the body coachman—who had been the equestrian professor of his youth—fairly put him out of conceit with the refrigerated hospitality of Lord and Lady De Vesci, his solemn brother and sister-in-law. He almost wished, for a moment, that he had brought his two little girls with him. He felt that perhaps even they might be loved and caressed at Heddeston!

But this visionary triumph was not destined to endure; the breakfast-hour and Joseph Willingham soon arrived to disenchant his imagination, and all was Spitzbergen again! Joseph received his brother with a very sincere and cordial demonstration of displeasure at his arrival. The interest of every pathetic history requires that it should have a villain to boast of; but although the younger Willingham's was a decidedly villainous position; although he was in truth "the mildewed ear blighting his wholesome brother," yet he had not the

energy, the stamina, the *character* of which villains are composed. He was a miserable being—strong only in selfishness—and incapable of injuring a fellow-creature, unless his personal interests were influenced by the deed. Unfortunately those of Charles stood in immediate competition with his own, and they were therefore pre-ordained to sacrifice.

For the preservation of all those who might be exposed to a similar warfare on the part of Joseph Willingham, Providence had gifted him with a singular tendency to the garrulous expounding of his own tactics. He was so pleased with his own prudence, so enamoured of his own plans, so persuaded of the excellence of his own theory of domestic management, that he could not refrain from the betrayal of all its littleness, and all his own egotism. "I certainly should not have closeted myself in such an inactive profession as the church," he would say, "only it would have been a thousand pities to let such a fine family living as Heddeston go to my cousin John." Or in an October sale of a horse to a particular friend, he would acknowledge, "I am aware that you get it five pounds

too cheap; but you see it would have eaten its head off during the winter."

In his fraternal colloquy with Charles, he was scarcely less explicit of his views and feelings. They breakfasted *tête-à-tête;* for Sir Claude habitually, and Mrs. Joseph incidentally, were too much indisposed to leave their chambers; and Charles Willingham, as he cast his eyes upon the redundant repast and its rich accessories, could not but mentally revert to the scanty frugality of his dampery at Chiswick.

"You are anchored in comfortable moorings, Joseph," said he, mournfully, as the heavy cream rolled slowly from its gilt ewer into his steaming cup.

"It may seem so—the world probably thinks so—and even *you*, with a narrow income, may fancy that my position is an enviable one. But when you have seen my father, half-doting, and peevish, and whimsical as he is, you will form a better judgment of all we have to put up with. He is incapable of managing his own affairs, yet jealous of the least interference; he requires the sacrifice of our whole time, yet is irritated by conversation, and will not hear of a

visitor so much as dining in the house. He does not spend the eighth of his income, yet he is always on the imaginary verge of pauperism —always fancying he shall be ruined!—and so he *would*, if Sophia and I did not keep an eye on the establishment. The Heddeston servants are quite enough to waste the whole estate; he has been ruled by them these fifty years, and it really requires a third power in the state to see justice done to all parties. Now, as my father does not choose to have *you*, Charles, it is just as well that he should have *us*. I have the interests of the whole family far more at heart, you know, than a stranger."

"Very true; and, in some points of view, it certainly *is* a sacrifice on your part. The rectory is a lovely spot, and you might keep your hunters there, and do as you liked; and I suppose my father maintains his old antipathy to Lord Carmychael and the hounds."

"Worse than ever; he allows me nothing but a shooting pony, and grudges me that."

"By Jove! I could not stand a privation on that score! Were I rector of Heddeston with—what shall I say?—fifteen hundred a year—I

would not give up the enjoyment of the field, and the credit of having a good horse in my stable, no! not for the advantage of living here at rack and manger!"

"My dear Charles! you miscalculate strangely. Fifteen hundred a year, did you say?—The first year I scarcely made up thirteen; and even last year, the balance of my tithe-book and glebe did not stretch beyond fourteen hundred and seventy-five! Believe me, you miscalculate strangely! As to living here at Heddeston, I have solely my ultimate interest in view. As I often observe to Sophia, the entail is so strict, that *I* can only hope to benefit by the personalty; so you see it becomes my business to watch over the economy of the house, and keep an eye to the accruing funds of the estate."

"Humph!" growled poor Charles, between the pauses of his buttered roll. "I perceive that *my* intervention is considered altogether superfluous in the family."

"Why, to say the truth, I could wish that you had postponed your journey, were it only for a week or so. When my father read in the Kentish Chronicle an account of the birth of

your last girl, he was in such a towering passion, that—as I observed to Sophia at the time—I think he would have gone any lengths to bribe you to cut off the entail; and—and"—

"Place you, Joseph, in my shoes."

"Why not exactly—that is, not immediately; —but perhaps eventually dispose of the property where there was the most promising succession of heirs male."

"Humph!" reiterated Charles Willingham, pushing away his plate with a gesture of despair.

"You see he had fixed his sanguine expectation on *my* having a son; and about a fortnight ago, when Sophia presented me with a little girl——"

"A little girl! aha!——"

"He grew more peevish and indignant than ever. He has scarcely had half an hour's accession of good humour since that time; and I verily believe that were there a young lady in the country fool enough to have him, Sir Claude would marry again, for the sole pleasure of spiting us both!"

"*Fool* enough!" again reiterated Charles,

with his thoughts reverted to his own experience of the interested selfishness of womankind. "As if there were not abundance of fools to be found in any county of the United Kingdom, ready to jump at a jointure on the Heddeston estates."

"That is just Sophia's remark! and I have profited by the suggestion to decline the proffered visit of two of her own younger sisters, whom her cunning mother was anxious to foist upon us during her confinement. No, no! I was quite up to that manœuvre, thank heaven!"

"You do not seem to entertain a very flattering opinion of your wife's relations."

"Who does?—one always knows them so much too well! However, to return to Sir Claude;—I really wish, Charles, you had not happened to time your visit so inauspiciously; for your arrival will only revive the remembrance of his mortification, and without benefiting you. He had almost got over his disappointment: he even asked me yesterday after dinner how the baby was getting on, and when Mrs. Joseph would be churched! To be sure he added one of his usual ungracious observa-

tions about the expense of maintaining so many nurses in the house; as if I and Sophia would keep a supernumerary servant one day longer than was necessary!"

"Mr. Joseph!" said the rubicund butler, slowly intruding his portly person into the breakfast-room, "my master has asked for you twice. He has taken his chocolate and half a square of dry toast, and complains of being very bilious."

"Well, well, never mind, Dickinson. Dr. Dodderwell will be here at two; and between the newspaper, and the weather—the glass, and the almanack—we shall get him on very well till then. Did you propose an Abernethy biscuit?"

"Sir Claude took five or six, sir, before he was up."

"Humph!" again exclaimed Charles Willingham, "*bilious!*—poor old man!"

"I will go and acquaint him with your arrival," said the Rector of Heddeston, rising deliberately from the discussion of a final cutlet. "For since you *are* come, he *must* know it; and the sooner we ascertain the effects of

the shock, the better. I quite tremble for poor Sophia's feelings on the occasion; her maternal solicitudes will naturally point out the very serious disadvantage your visit may prove to our poor little destitute girl."

"*And mine!*" ejaculated Charles. But Mr. Joseph had already departed on his pious errand; and Dickinson, the roseate butler, alone remained in audience of his pathetic apostrophe.

"Ah! Master Charles!" responded the old man, with a sympathetic wheeze, and a prolonged vibration of his powdered head.

It was a shake which, like Lord Burghleigh's, was destined to supersede a world of eloquence; and Mr. Willingham interpreted, from the gesture, a thousand unutterable things. "Dickinson!" said he, "times are sadly altered at the Court."

CHAPTER II.

Un homme partial est exposé à de petites mortifications; car, comme il est également impossible que ceux qu'il favorise soient toujours heureux, et que ceux contre qui il se déclare, soient toujours en faute, ou malheureux, il nait de là qu'il lui arrive souvent de perdre contenance ou par le mauvais succès de ses amis, ou par la gloire de ceux qu'il n'aime point. *La Bruyère.*

"JOSEPH, pray take your feet off the fender," said poor peevish Sir Claude, as they were all three sitting together on the following evening, "You fidget me to death."

The submissive Joseph obeyed.

"And pray don't balance your chair in that tiresome manner, you are enough to give one a nervous fever."

Again Joseph was obedient: and Charles Willingham began to think that the dampery at Chiswick, with its freedom of action, was in

truth preferable to the splendid slavery of Heddeston Court.

"Has any one been down to the lodge? Are the evening papers come yet?"

"No, Sir."

"I really think the Highflyer grows slower and slower every day. Don't they talk of starting a new coach?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Ay, ay! but it will be some time before the old county families bestow their patronage upon an upstart city-speculation."

"Very true, Sir."

"And pray, Sir, why do you suppose that we are greater fools than the rest of the world?"

"I, Sir?—I suppose nothing."

"No, truly," muttered Sir Claude; "between indolence and caution, there is no pumping an opinion out of you. An't you going to visit your lady this evening, Joseph?"

"I was just thinking of moving, Sir; and as it is late, perhaps you will allow me to see you up to bed first."

"By no means. Your brother Charles's company enlivens me. I have got a great deal to

ask him about what has been going on in town this session, and you may profit by the opportunity to amuse yourself with the squalling of your bantling—your *young lady!*—the first that has graced, or disgraced, poor Heddeston Court these fifty years. Thank God, I never cursed myself with any thing but *sons.*"

"You were in luck, Sir," said Charles, attempting to laugh away his brother's embarrassment, and to conceal his own vexation.

"There—there—good night, Joe," resumed Sir Claude, fretfully. "Take care to turn the handle of the door, instead of slamming it; and pray don't stalk along the passages over-head, as if you were ascertaining the stability of the rafters."

"No, Sir, no!" said Joseph, with humiliated forbearance; and as he left the room he cast a resentful look upon his brother, as being both the witness and the cause of all this extraordinary irritation.

Charles Willingham had never at any period of his life been a favourite with his father. Sir Claude was a jealous, narrow-minded man, who had been equally disgusted by the popularity

and by the liberal expenditure of his heir. That he *was* his heir, indeed, was a sufficient motive for distrust; he looked upon the deed of entail which secured his son's inheritance, as an injurious act committed by his ancestors in favour of his posterity. Joseph was the object of his bounty—the martyr of his caprices; but, as to Charles, the only way in which he could exert a paternal authority over *him*, was by rendering the period of his own life a period of penance to his son; he knew that he had no *post obit* powers of tyrannical oppression.

And then his wilful marriage had proved a fresh stumbling-block of offence in the path of this peremptory parent. Sir Claude Willingham was a proud man, and was anxious that his successors should form suitable alliances; but not by connecting themselves with a degree of rank superior to his own—he was extremely tenacious of his supremacy in his clan. At the time when the maritime provinces of the south were infected with the invasion-fever, with all its malignant symptoms of fencibles and volunteers, the Heddeston yeomanry corps

had well nigh brought down the honours of the peerage upon its founder and commandant; and in that case, Sir Claude would have made no objection to the union of either of his sons with a nobleman's daughter—provided always that the nobleman were a baron, and dating from no very ancient creation:—any reference to Magna Charta or Domesday-book, would have been sufficient to forbid the banns.

But Lady Maria De Vesci was descended from a whole dynasty of antediluvian earls; she must necessarily be proud; she was confessedly poor: and the measure of Sir Claude's antipathies rose beyond all just bounds. He therefore avenged his sense of domestic injury on occasion of Charles's filial rebellion, by increased affection and redoubled liberality towards Joseph. He installed him in the family-living, domesticated him under his own roof; and offered but a very transient and trifling opposition to an alliance which would have revolted him at any other time by its plebeian associations.

"You see, Sir," observed Joseph, after having cautiously revealed his long and secret engagements with Miss Sophia Bodham, "a clergyman

should neither expect nor desire to form a very brilliant connexion; he must look to the comforts and respectability of his future home: fine ladies make but a sorry figure at the head of an economical glebe-house establishment. Now Sophia is an excellent manager—has been accustomed all her life to clerical habits; and the fortune she does not *bring* me, she will save by her prudence."

"Of two bad choices, Joe, I own you have made the best: this affair does not vex me half so much as Charles's cursed folly. *Two* Lady Marias in the family would have been the death of me at once."

"I am persuaded, Sir, you will be enchanted with my Sophia!—such a modest sense of her own inferiority, and of her strange good fortune in matching into the Willingham family!"

"The daughter of a country parson—of a schoolmaster—may well be proud of such an alliance."

"Not exactly a *schoolmaster*, Sir;—a respectable clergyman preparing a few young men of condition for college, can scarcely be called a schoolmaster!"

"There is only a bunch of birch to choose between the two—no mighty distinction!"

"So excellent a housekeeper as Sophia, I suppose never existed. You have often heard me speak of the bread at Ilverstone; the second course at the parsonage was positively equal to Mrs. Frangipane's; and Sophia, to my certain knowledge, presided over every thing. We never sat down to dinner that her mother did not mention it!"

"I wonder what Lady Maria knows of the mysteries of the oven!" exclaimed Sir Claude, feebly chafing his wasted hands with an air of triumph; although he secretly despised all these details, and would, under any other circumstances, have seen through and resented the whole plot.

"Oh, you must be well aware, Sir, that *I* have no pretensions to consort with lords and ladies; the respectability of my own family-connexions is sufficient for *me*. Where the estates are bound by an entail so strict as ours, a younger brother, who incurs the risk of a numerous offspring by an early marriage, is bound to consult their interest by selecting a

mother who has been carefully and frugally educated."

A numerous offspring!—new projects unfolded themselves to the imagination of Sir Claude at the mere sound! Lady Maria had already produced a daughter; and might yield no future heir-male to the property; while Mrs. Joseph would probably enable him to baffle the hopes of his own prodigal son;—Mrs. Joseph would probably prove a Hecuba, and supply the Hedde ston entail with a score or two of young Trojans On this hint he spoke his sentence of paternal approval; and within a few weeks, the young couple were united by his cordial sanction, and settled irrevocably at the Court. It was said in the county, that he was a most placable and liberal father.—So much, again, for the opinion of the world!

During many months the establishment flourished surprisingly under the new administration; Sir Claude had never thought the Heddeston poultry so fat, the Heddeston cheeses so rich, nor the Heddeston apricots so transparently clarified, as since Mrs. Joseph's accession to the throne of domestic management. She was in-

defatigable in wiping his spectacles, reading the newspapers, chiding the retardment of the High-flyer, and ringing the bell for Dr. Dodderwell's horse, on the conclusion of his daily visit to the valetudinarian of the Court. Sir Claude observed to every successive visitor that his daughter-in-law was a most superior young woman; and as Lady Maria's second child had proved to be another daughter, the prospects of Sophia's promised increase to the family soon afforded the engrossing interest of his selfish and fractious existence. But when Miss Willingham the third was announced to her ungracious grandsire, the *prestige* formed by his anticipations vanished in a moment. He now began to despise Mrs. Joseph as cordially as he had ever detested Lady Maria; she had been the instrument of disappointing his malice;—she had been the means of proving him in the wrong!

"Well, Charles, and what do you think of your brother's wife?" demanded the old man, with a sneer, when due time had been accorded for the stealthy progress of Joseph's footsteps above. "I think you visited her this morning?"

"I did, Sir; and your previous information

concerning her had been so unfavourable, that I was rather agreeably disappointed."

"Humph! Why you don't mean to tell me that you did not find her deucedly ugly?"

"Youth is a veil that covers so many defects!"

"Aye, and worse than ugly—mean-looking contracted; an upstart in every feature, every gesture, every tone!—I hate a vulgar voice."

"So do I, Sir; but Mrs. Joseph employed her's in the utterance of so many kind expressions concerning my brother and his whole family, that—"

"A mere hypocrite—a very crocodile!"

"That I had no leisure to think of any thing but his good fortune in having secured so acquiescent and domestic a companion," continued Charles; who, for his brother's sake, was willing to give the most favourable character to his opinions. His feelings had been, in fact, considerably mollified towards Joseph by the spectacle of his humiliating and uneasy position in his father's house; his own nature, too, was so amiable and conciliatory—he had been so much touched by the art with which his sister-in-law had exhibited her baby, and her maternal affec-

tions to captivate the young father, parted for the first time since his marriage from his own home and his own children—that he was very sincere in his admiration of the discretion of Joseph's choice. He could not but contrast it with his personal predicament; he could not but compare Sophia's caudle-cup sensibility with the callous and unmotherly fine-ladyism of Lady Maria. Sir Claude's ill-nature, however, was not to be so silenced.

"Acquiescent and domestic truly! Why, I suppose you know who she was?—I suppose you know that your brother brought his bride home to Heddeston Court with her plebeian fingers covered with the paste of the dumplings she had been kneading all her life?"

"I have a great respect for dumplings and their artificers, Sir," said Charles, laughing; "a narrow income makes a man acquainted with strange fare.'

"Charles, replied his father solemnly, without noticing this running commentary, "if ever you should have a son—which I begin to doubt—never send him to a lonely parsonage in a marshy country, where there are four cunning

unmarried daughters, open-mouthed, to decoy his boyhood into a premature engagement. What signifies any scholarship he may possibly acquire, compared with the low-born, low-bred wife with which he is *sure* to hamper himself."

"*My* son (I acknowledge with you, Sir, that he begins to appear a very apochryphal personage) will probably inherit his father's predilections; and had you sent *me* parsonaging into the marshes instead of Joseph, I should have been far more likely to return to Heddeston with an ague caught in snipe-shooting than with a vulgar wife caught in——"

"Aha! the truth is out then; you *do* think her vulgar!" interrupted the old man with glee, spitefully chafing his lean hands. "Pray now, Charles, is Lady Maria dark or fair, tall or short? When I expressed my original disapprobation of your marriage with a poor nobleman's daughter, I certainly had not dreamt of your brother's matching with a poor clergyman's."

This was the first inquiry Sir Claude had ever hazarded touching his aristocratic daughter-in-law, and the opening appeared to her husband highly propitious. "Maria is a remarkably

graceful, elegant woman, Sir, without being strictly beautiful. She has great refinement of mind, and a degree of judgment highly valuable to a hair-brained scape-grace like myself. I can accuse her but of one failing, my dear father—that of sharing *your* unkind antipathy to little girls. She was deeply concerned by the birth of a second daughter."

"Was she, by Jove?" exclaimed Sir Claude, brightening; "I'm glad to hear it—*very* glad to hear it. Well, well! she must come down to Heddeston, and freshen herself up with Kentish fare and Kentish breezes, eh, Charles? Ay! and she can bring the *girls*—the *two* girls—with her. I suppose they will not look uglier, or squall louder than Mrs. Joseph's?"

"Little Claudia, Sir, is a perfect beauty; and——"

"You have named your eldest after me, eh?"

"I took that liberty without troubling you by a probably unwelcome request for your sanction; and Eleanor, the baby——"

"Well, don't let me hear any more about them. Go back to town to-morrow, Charles, and bring them down with you as soon as you

can. I suppose you have a carriage. I suppose that, had you been limited to *one* hundred a-year, a Lady Maria would have required an equipage?"

"Lady De Vesci's was bequeathed to us by her will; but poor Maria found the common comforts of life so much beyond our reach, that she insisted upon having it sold, as well as some family jewels, which were far more precious to her. But the sacrifice was made to pay *my* debts, and she has never appeared to lament it."

Sir Claude, who was little aware that this latter part of the statement was a very amiable and palliative view of the fact, on the part of his hen-pecked son, was prodigiously ashamed. "Then you had better take up the carriage with you; *my* daughter-in-law must not be seen in a hack chaise. You did wrong to part with your wife's property, Charles; you should have applied to me for assistance."

"If you remember, Sir, the Christmas before last——"

"Pshaw—pshaw!"—what is the use of reverting to old grievances? All that is over

now, and had better be forgotten. You must prepare Lady Maria to overlook the past, and to enjoy her visit to Heddeston."

"It is an event to which she has looked as an unattainable pleasure."

"At all events," said old Willingham, pursuing the train of his own reflections, "*her* faults will be those of a gentlewoman. Now you have no conception of the low, vulgar structure of Mrs. Joseph's mind! For the first six months of her residence here, she used to harass me to death with her eternal details of the peculations of my servants. She spoke so plausibly, that she even persuaded me to institute a stable-allowance for my horses; and I wish you had seen the old set of bays at the end of two months!—It cost me twice the money saved, in farrier's bills, and beans, to make up for lost time! You must have observed yourself, a thousand paltry alterations in the minutiæ of the household. I trust you did not attribute them to *me*?"

"I hardly imagined, Sir, that my brother and his wife would presume to act without your sanction."

Sir Claude was ashamed to confess to his elder son, how thoroughly he had been cajoled into delegating his authority into their hands. "Now just look at this cursed grate," said he, taking up the poker, by way of cover to his own confusion. "Rumfordized! you see—Rumfordized to the standard of her own parsonage-experience! As if a handful of coals could be coaxed into giving out the genial warmth of a full, glowing mass of ignited matter!—and at Heddeston, too, where the woods are groaning to be cut down! By Jove! I don't wonder that this chafing-dish of cinders sometimes provokes Joseph to put his long thin legs upon the fender! Till that woman was shut up in her own room, I was wholly unsuspicious of the innovations she had introduced among my old servants. But their complaints have reached me now: I have found her out; and as soon as she gets down stairs and about again, I shall take care to let her know, that if she cannot repress her ardour for minor domestic reformation, she must practise it at Heddeston Rectory, and not at Heddeston Court. I do not intend *either* of my sons' wives to regulate my establishment."

Charles Willingham, who, as I have before observed, was considerably brightened in his perceptions by the constant companionship of Lady Maria, was wise enough to discover that this rapid change of feeling, and explosion of displeasure towards Mrs. Joseph, arose solely from the sex of her recent offspring; and therefore exulted very moderately over the prospects it afforded to himself. The object of his visit, however, was already more than attained; and he was more deeply touched by his father's kindness, more gratified by his invitation to his family, than its real motives deserved. He listened with respect to the old and well-known effusions of Protestant loyalty with which Sir Claude could not refrain from closing the evening; and on Dickinson's arrival with the ten o'clock tray, he patiently sympathized with his father's long-established murmurs against the inconsistency of his gruel, and the tenuity of his dry toast.

On the following evening, the scene was duly recounted and re-recounted by the fire-side of the dampery at Chiswick; and it was with a sentiment of the most elated surprise that Lady Maria found herself, and her parapher-

nalia of daughters, nurses and bandboxes, rolling through the county of Kent, in a carriage bearing the emblazonments of the family of the Willinghams towards its ancient inheritance. She had already pre-determined that it should be long enough before the horses' heads were turned, with the same burden, in an opposite direction. She had very little intention of ever finding her way back to Chiswick.

CHAPTER III.

When Greek meets Greek—then comes the tug of war.
Shakspeare.

THREE days had necessarily elapsed between the departure of Charles Willingham from his father's mansion, and the arrival of Lady Maria and her children among the men of Kent; and three days afford a sufficient period for wonderful manœuvres to an active commander of the forces. Mrs. Joseph, under the excitement of her opponent's advance towards the field of action, had defied both doctor and nurse—ancient axiom and modern experience, and, armed in a panoply of flannels, had made Sir Claude's tea, and shared his dry toast and gruel

in his own particular parlour, on two successive evenings.

"Salt seasons dainties," sings Lord Byron; "Tea seasons scandal," sings the wooden cuckoo of every maiden coterie; and it was miraculous with how abundant a proportion of envenomed breath Mrs. Joseph contrived to accompany the preliminary two cups, and supplementary "small half quarter of a dish," which formed the nightly stint of Sir Claude. She did more than "hint a fault and hesitate dislike," towards her coming sister-in-law. She boldly affirmed that *poor Charles* was sadly changed since his marriage; that his brother, in their private conversations, had found him dreadfully low; that it was to be hoped Lady Maria might be induced to alter her mode of conduct towards her husband and innocent babes during their visit to Heddeston; but that really after her ingratitude in deserting the aged and infirm parent, who had proved so affectionate a mother to her, for the sake of a dissipated young man, with whom she had been only a few weeks acquainted, it would be absurd to expect much, either from her feelings or her principles. No! it was very plain that

Lady Maria had *no heart!* Mrs. Joseph believed, indeed, that family affection was no longer in vogue among the circles of *high life!*

Now Sir Claude, although he detested the traces of *low life* manifest in herself, and was somewhat on his guard against the interested motives prompting her malicious insinuations, could not, from habit, divest himself of a certain degree of faith in her gossiping narratives. At all events, the favourable picture traced by his elder son of his wife and home, faded under the disparaging light thus thrown upon its obscurities: the whole day on which Lady Maria was expected at the Court was passed in the most feverish restlessness; in wandering from chamber to chamber in fretful inspection of their preparations; which, through the officious interposition of Mrs. Joseph, were rendered as expensive and as troublesome to every member of the extensive household, as the utmost refinement of ill nature could instigate. Perhaps she desired to extend, to their latest limit, those privileges of domestic supremacy which her presentiments assured her were rapidly verging towards abrogation. Meantime poor Sir Claude,

in spite of an extraordinary indulgence in anti-spasmodic tinctures, and an extra spoonful of white mustard-seed, was as nervous and unhappy as heart could wish:—already he repented of his superfluous complaisance towards his eldest son's family, as bitterly as though it were not among the first instances of good-nature which he had exercised during the sixty-eight years and a half of his mortal existence!

But Mrs. Joseph little knew with whom she had to deal! As well might she have attempted to "drink up Eisel—eat a crocodile," as cope with the profound finesse of Lady Maria. Her's was the mere raw material—the mere brute quality of *cunning;* but Lady Maria was endowed with the same natural qualifications, polished into *tact* by an early encounter with the friction of the world. For nine-and-twenty years she had been a spectator or actor in the intrigues of society at large; for nine-and-twenty years she had been dexterously administering to the weaknesses and vices of others, and for a considerable portion of that time she had been busied in managing her mother, who made up in obstinacy and perverseness what she

wanted in intellect and the power of self-governance. She had already decided that Sir Claude would form by comparison a docile victim: to hamper *him* with bit and bridle would be mere play-work; and as to Mrs. Joseph herself, she felt that it would be a waste of tactics to employ any thing but the most straightforward measures, in discomfiting and discountenancing the obscure daughter of a web-footed dominie, whether M. A. or B. A. or LL.D.—Mrs. Joseph, indeed!—Lady Maria scarcely condescended to think of her as a rival. Like Napoleon, she had already prematurely prepared the bulletin, proclaiming her sister-in-law's "total defeat, with an immense loss."

But the carriage was scarcely disencumbered of its multitudinous imperials, and she had not listened fifteen minutes to Sir Claude's minute catechization concerning the state of the roads, and the promptitude of attendance insured by the sight of the Willingham equipage, throughout all the varieties of White Lions and Blue Boars between Camberwell and Heddeston, before she found occasion to alter her opinion. There is a sort of freemasonry among the artful,

revealing them to each other at first sight. Like the Cartouche and Mandrin of the French Vaudeville, who mutually disencumber their pockets of watch and purse during an introductory dialogue, the sisters instantly recognised the masterly adroitness visible in the efforts of each; and Lady Maria was really delighted by the discovery. She was something of an amateur in her vocation; and her hand had been so long out—to employ finesse in her intercourse with Charles would have been so like advancing *en échelon* to attack an undefended stone wall—that she quite congratulated herself upon her future prospects of finding occasion to rub the rust from her obsolete weapons of offence and defence. As to the reverend Joseph himself, it was astonishing how quickly and how completely her dislike subsided into contempt. A man whose loquacity prompted him to place his plan of attack in the hands of a rival general, was despicable indeed!

Mrs. Joseph Willingham had sufficient discernment to be perfectly aware of the superiority of her opponent's strength in the contest; but the mere apprehension of defeat, by depriving her

of her presence of mind, soon threw all her manœuvres into confusion, and effectually exposed her weak points to the enemy. Deeming any thing like defiance, or even bold defence, to be unavailing, she affected a new mode of interesting the sympathy of Sir Claude. She assumed the modesty of conscious insignificance, and attempted to become "poor dear Mrs. Joseph." This was a dead failure! While she toiled and tugged, sighed, talked, and insinuated, Lady Maria defeated her labours by the well-maintained semblance of perfect unconsciousness; like a snake she glided, with noiseless gesture, hither and thither—piercing every auger-hole she wished to penetrate. No sooner did she find her sister-in-law take refuge in an amiable humility, than she elevated her own head with graceful dignity and overlooked her altogether;—sending her to Coventry with the most courteous and urbane indifference.

Possessed of none but the common-place principles of her art, Mrs. Joseph meanwhile continued to employ them as the forlorn hope of her ambition. She persisted in addressing her flagrant adulation to Sir Claude, uncon-

scious that, although he had been contented to swallow its flattery while no spectator stood by to satirize the meanness of both, he was by no means anxious to betray his corrupt appetite to his new inmate. She had instructed her nurse to angle for his favour with the usual grandfather's bait—the marvellous likeness of her jaundiced infant to himself; and to contrive that its daily walks should cross *his* daily airings, and its ascent and descent of the great stairs coincide with his own periodical hours of rising and setting. But it had never occurred to her plebeian taste to feminize the Christian appellation of the touchy Baronet; and while she became fidgeted to agonies by his frequent inquiries after little Claudia, she was amazed by the rigid tenacity with which Lady Maria persisted in secluding her children from his observation. On her first arrival she had prudently selected for their use the hereditary nursery of the house; which, as is usually the case in respectable old family mansions, was elevated beyond all risk of intruding its clamours on the rest of the family; and was undisturbed itself by aught save the cawing of

rooks on the chimney tops, or the eaves'-dropping companionship of the swifts and swallows.

The two unwelcome Miss Willinghams, therefore, were neither seen, nor heard of, nor thought of in the family. Lady Maria had the sense to resist all the old man's courteous overtures for their appearance in the drawing-room; and no sooner did he commence his daily inquiries concerning "poor little Claudia," than she immediately led him to incidentalize on his own "life and times," by some adroit allusion to Lord North's administration (the epoch of his maiden speech); or by some inquiry touching the beauty of Lady Sarah Bunbury, who was the cousin and court-rival of his first love. She possessed a divining rod, at whose touch the rock-spring of his latent eloquence failed not to burst forth; and a mental stop-watch, by which she could exactly ascertain and limit the duration of its flow.

Now of Lord North and Lady Sarah, Mrs. Joseph was wholly innocent; nor did the experience of her marsh seclusion suggest a single question by which she could mark an assumed interest in the topic, or prolong the debate.

Besides, Lady Maria possessed another vantage ground of unquestionable supremacy. Constitutionally trained from her earliest youth by the thermometer of a Dowager's temperament, she could not only preserve an unheightened complexion amidst the feverish excitements of the atmosphere of Sir Claude's valetudinarian parlour, but could actually luxuriate in the breathlessness of his hermetically-sealed chariot;—an enclosure which Mrs. Joseph, whose experience was limited to the parsonic modesty of a gig, never encountered without peril of epilepsy. *Her* Galenic maxims, too, were culled from the exploded pages of Buchan, while those of Lady Maria recorded the *viva voce* wisdom of Sir Walter Farquhar and Dr. Baillie; and could run through an extempore scale of fashionable nostrums, including every "anti" that ever enriched the stamp-office, or the columns of the Morning Post.

Sir Claude Willingham became insensibly entranced by the influence of all these domestic accomplishments. Weeks passed away like days, and months like weeks; and although Lady Maria refrained not from periodical allu-

sions to the charms of Chiswick, to the cording of trunks, and the epistolary importunities of her London friends and relatives for their return, she was delighted to perceive that the old gentleman was obstinately pre-determined against sanctioning their further domiciliation at the dampery. No sooner had she satisfied herself that her society was vitally important to his comfort, than she resolved to retain an absentee tenure upon that much-abhorred dwelling, as an admonitory rod to be held, *in terrorem*, over the head of her father-in-law; and the very name of Chiswick became converted into a sort of spur wherewith to rouse his flagging affections.

With the valetocracy of Heddeston Court, in the mean time, Lady Maria entertained a tacit alliance, after the fashion of the unjust steward: giving them no personal trouble, and graciously overlooking peculation and peccadillos wherever they confronted her eye. Moreover, she possessed over Mrs. Joseph, in the estimation of the ancient servants of the house, the superlative charm of patrician rank; she was not only the wife of the heir apparent of all its honours, but, by birthright, herself a Ladyship! If pride

were banished from the earth, it would be found safely sheltered in the steward's room of some family mansion!—the last temple dedicated to its altars.

The neighbours, too, were all on the eldest, or *inheriting* side of the question. The grandiosities, from a dread of plebeian intrusion into their mystic circle; and the mediocrities, from a jealousy of seeing Mrs. Joseph promoted over their own heads.

"It must be a great bore to poor Lady Maria Willingham, who has always been accustomed to such good society, to find herself forced into association with that vulgar schoolmaster's daughter," said Lady Monteagle to her own four tall spinsters, each and all of whom had formerly attempted, without success, to undermine the fidelity of the staunch Joseph towards his heroine of the marshes.

"It must, indeed, mamma," replied Miss Marian, the eldest of the maiden squadron. "A younger brother's wife, too, to set herself up as an authority—and such an authority! She had actually contrived to persuade that poor silly old man to shut himself up in his for-

lorn dungeon, and convert himself into a recluse! However, since Lady Maria's arrival, things have found their way back into their old channel. We have dined at Heddeston four or five times since Christmas; and although one seldom meets any one there but the old humdrum county set—people one knows by heart in all their samenesses of dress, equipage, and opinions—still it is better than having the house of our nearest neighbour barred up, like the County Lunatic Asylum."

"True, my dear; and although, as you wisely observe, we never meet any thing new there—any thing *available*"—she looked significantly at her four unmarried daughters—"yet the house is a very good resource whenever we have a party staying with us. Heddeston Court, and a luncheon, form an excellent object for a ride, when your brother and his college friends are here. It looks suspicious, you know, to keep young men sauntering about the shrubberies, or lounging in the music-room all the morning; and it is far more agreeable, and more useful too, to find the honours done by a woman of the world, like Lady Maria, than by such a

prim, underbred, overbred, ceremonious personage as that Mrs. Joseph."

"To be sure it is," exclaimed Margaret, the youngest of the quartette. "She might have done very well to preside over the baked meats of the smoky vicarage parlour; but I never saw any one more miserably misplaced than she used to look in that grand old hall, among the family plate and family pictures. It was entirely Mrs. Joseph, by-the-bye, who put a stop to our project of a bow-meeting in Heddeston Vale."

"Yes, Margaret," rejoined her sister, "and don't you remember when she planted Lord Stapylford next mamma that morning at luncheon?—and having placed you and me together, desired her own stupid bore of a husband to 'take care of the young ladies;'—as if *he* knew how to do any thing but take care of *himself!* Such ignorance of the world! Now, Lady Maria has *so* much tact!"

"I must say," observed Mrs. Darnham, the wife of the curate of Heddeston, to her mild spouse, "that Lady Maria's arrival at the Court has been a very fortunate event. This is the second haunch we have had this season, be-

sides constant supplies of fruit, and the loan of the pony! Now it would have been long enough before the Joseph Willinghams thought of showing us any such attention. *She* had been so long accustomed to the saving line, that she seemed even to grudge the poor creatures from the village every stick they were allowed to gather in the avenue! As to ourselves, considering who she *was*, and what we *are*, I think it was incumbent on her to be more considerate and more respectful: but fine feathers make fine birds; and since she so successfully employed hers in lining her nest, she has quite forgotten you and me, Darnham!"

"Ay! my dear! and herself too. Now it was only last Sunday three weeks that ——"

"For my part," interrupted Mrs. D, who was far from tolerant of any prolixity but her own, "I do most sincerely hope that Lady Maria will give an heir to the estate, and establish herself at Heddeston Court, if it be only to spite Mrs. Joseph. Her Ladyship is so vastly condescending! She lent me the pattern of Miss Claudia's frock last week for my little Milicent; and she seldom comes here without going over

the poultry yard. I have no doubt I shall get a brood of the Heddeston game-bantams before the summer is over; and Mrs. Joseph, you know, refused me, point blank, last year."

I know not whether the Destinies were propitiated by the anxieties of Mrs. Darnham, or by the secret invocations of the Lady Maria herself; but before the close of the second year of her settlement in Kent, its County Chronicle announced, with becoming paragraphic honours, that the family tree of Heddeston Court was graced with fresh glory in the birth of a son! and all the preparation, expectation, and exultation which had long awaited the event, fell far short of the universal triumph bestowed on its realization. The bells of Heddeston Tower were well nigh chimed to powder—the woods of Heddeston Chase were all but reduced to ashes by a mighty conflagration of bonfires! Torrents of ale that might have floated the yacht club, poured their amber tides through the clamorous village; and its weekly dole was daily repeated between Sabbath and Sabbath for the space of a calendar month. As to Lady Maria, she oppressed her agonized sister-in-law

on the occasion with a martyrdom of prosperous condescension; and it was diverting to observe the spasmodic twist of countenance which Mrs. Joseph attempted to convert into a congratulatory smile, as she bent over the cradle of an heir apparent, as eagerly coveted as ever was a Dauphin of France!

Charles Willingham himself, although of the family far the most interested in the event, rejoiced with becoming moderation in his fortunate paternity. He loved little Claudia and Eleanor, in fact, as well or better than the little fair white mass of human imbecility, displayed by the head-nurse as his "princely boy;" and since he had been admitted by his whimsical parent to share in the comforts of his brother's prosperity, he was neither anxious to provoke his envy, nor supersede his expectations. He was good-naturedly fond of Joseph, and selfishly satisfied to insure his daily companionship in riding, driving, shooting, fishing, and hunting over the estate. So long as Joseph and his wife remained at Heddeston, he did not feel himself a peremptory fixture at his father's tea-table; or compelled to economize with the bailiff, or

prose with the steward. Leave him the legislation of the body corporate of game-keepers, and the persecution and prosecution of all the poachers throughout the property, and Charles cared but little in whose hands the budget of the financial department was deposited by his father.

But of all the personages affected by this important family catastrophe, Sir Claude was at once the most elated and the most actively malicious. It seemed impossible that *he* should forgive Mrs. Joseph for having been the passive means of disappointing the projects he had formed for his favourite son; and in good truth he laboured to drug her cup of bitterness with fourfold wormwood. He insisted upon leaning on her arm in all his visits to the exulting Lady Maria; upon consulting *her* taste in all his presents to his auspicious grandson; and he continually signified in her reluctant ears his intention of making an immediate settlement in favour of the female branches of Lady Maria's offspring. He scarcely knew, he said, in what more flattering manner to mark his esteem and gratitude: and from that hour the little girls

were peremptorily withdrawn from their elevated solitude, and promoted from their companionship with the solitary sparrow on the house-top, to that of the stately peacocks spreading their lavish glories among the beautiful lawns of Heddeston Court. Their Lady mother, on her re-descent into the saloon, found Claudia established on grandpapa's knee, and Eleanor busy with his spectacle case; but she was passive under the innovation. She even began to agree with worthy Mrs. Darnham, that they were the prettiest little girls in the world, and to forgive her husband's predilection in their favour; for they no longer marred the prospects of her ambition!

Meantime poor Mary Willingham, Mrs. Joseph's unlucky babe, remained strictly exiled to her own apartment. Lady Maria, with provoking patronage, insisted that she should share the favour and indulgence lavished upon her own two graceful sprites. But it might not be! the malicious old man willingly tolerated her admittance into their pleasures; while, by his sneers of comparison, he contrived to convert the concession into a chastisement.

Mrs. Joseph's heart had long been bursting with mortification. She saw that her own sun had set for ever at the Court—that her hopes of domestic rule were at an end—that she must confine the future triumphs of her pride to her *own* family; where the parade of having married a Baronet's son would still count for something. Poor thing! she was left to the miserable consolation of her precedence over her neighbours, Mesdames Darnham and Pilkington, and of saying spiteful things to Lady Maria whenever occasion offered. Nor in truth was her fair sister-in-law slow at a rejoinder; she was far better skilled to envelop her retorts in a provoking display of courtesy; but they were not the less bitter nor the less biting. Whenever this war of words occurred between them—and it was generally after Sir Claude had droned himself to sleep for the evening in his easy chair—their respective husbands, like the owners of two angry dogs, were fully occupied in patting them into mutual submission. Occasional growls or snarls from their several retreats, would still give tokens of suppressed ill-will; tokens which were as constantly soothed

by "Sophia! pray recollect yourself!" or "Dearest Maria! for *my* sake forbear!" from the appeasing lips of the perplexed brothers. Sophia, indeed, appeared to be the only person towards whom dearest Maria did not deem it necessary, or find it her policy, to assume a show of courtesy. In *her* presence she wore all her failings with undisguised defiance—snapt at her husband, scolded her children, sneered at Sir Claude. She seemed determined to mark her contempt, by an exhibition of her utter indifference concerning Mrs. Joseph's opinion.

So long as the balance of domestic power remained in any degree suspended, this state of things had endured, and might endure: but from the moment that Sir Claude's partiality threw an undue weight into the scale—from the moment that victory, perched on his little grandson's cradle, decided in favour of Lady Maria, the conflict was no longer to be borne. A few weeks afterwards, as Charles Willingham and his brother were riding home together from a coursing meeting, Joseph unfolded his intended removal to his Rectory. Much did he say of

the duties of his profession, which required his stationary residence in the village: but that sort of cant phraseology did not impose upon the kind-hearted Charles, who had long sympathized in his mortification.

"Duties of your profession? And pray why is Darnham a less efficient representative than he was last year? He understands the people and their ways far better than you do; and at a distance of two miles, you are always within reach of a consultation when difficulties arise. No, no! Joseph! you really must not think of leaving my father."

"You do not consider the solemn engagements into which I have entered towards my parishioners. The parish becomes more populous every year; and the farmers are beginning to hint at something about a third service; at which Darnham very reasonably demurs."

"Well, then;—increase his salary; give him the pasturage of the home field and the right of common he has asked you for so often, and the bargain will easily be made. I have a very good opinion of Darnham. He got that thorn

out of Don's foot, which puzzled us all so terribly the first day of pheasant-shooting last year."

"But even were an arrangement effected—and I really *must* consult my own interests first in such a case—I consider it my duty——"

"Come, come, Joe!—you know as well as I do that all this sudden change of plan arises solely from my father's slights to little Mary and your wife; which, I do assure you, vex me at least as much as yourself. But you know his whimsical temper; and it is just as likely that next week he may take it into his head to banish Nell and Claudia."

"No, brother, no!—not while *you* have a promising boy to become the head of the family. To speak openly, however, it *is* our mutual change of prospects which has influenced me about removing to the Rectory. As long as our chances were equal, my father being as you observe so very whimsical, there was no saying what his partiality might have induced him to do about the entail."

"Humph!" muttered Charles, switching off the head of a tall thistle in the hedge, to the great discomfiture of his favourite mare.

"But now, you know, all *that* is over. My father hates the sight of us; and if we irritate him by outstaying our welcome—why, we may lose our chance of even the personalty, which at present I consider as good as settled on us. He signed his will the day before your arrival."

"Humph!" repeated Charles—sacrificing a second aspiring weed to his resentment of his brother's selfishness.

"Now—as Sophia very sensibly says—if we settle at the Rectory during my father's life-time, he will be obliged, in common decency, to do something for us in the way of furniture, and plate, and all that; which will cost him little, and be every thing to us: whereas, if we wait until his death, all the Heddeston property, which is heirloom—"

"But with your living, and allowance, you must make up, even now, three thousand a year?"

"True! but an increasing family!"

"Well! well! settle it in your own and your wife's way," rejoined Charles Willingham, somewhat nettled, as he turned his remembrances back upon Chiswick's moistened shades. "Be assured, Joseph, that no brotherly affec-

tion will be wanting on my part, to improve your future situation."

"We think of removing in May; for Sophia will be confined sometime in August."

In May, accordingly, they did remove: in August, Mrs. Joseph presented her husband with a very superfluous son; and poor peevish Sir Claude, in the midst of his exultation at finding his honourable name thus doubly armed against extinction, caught cold in his very first visit of inspection to the Rectory. With the assistance of a physician or two, he contrived to aggravate his disorder into danger; and before Joseph and Sophia had found time to re-elevate their drooping crests, or to form new projects about the entail, a pompous achievement affixed over the entrance of Heddeston Court, announced the final defeat of their unreasonable expectations, and the accession of Sir Charles Willingham to his title and estates.

Happy Lady Maria! How gratefully did she attach herself to the active Dr. Dodderwell! How smilingly attire herself in a second suit of filial sables!

CHAPTER IV.

Death having preyed upon the outward parts
Leaves them insensible; his siege is now
Against the mind, the which he pricks and wounds
With many legions of strange fantasies.

Shakspeare.

Sir Charles and Lady Maria Willingham had now attained a very elevated point of human prosperity. They were in the enjoyment of a splendid income and an ancient title; they possessed an almost baronial mansion in the very garden of England; and a house in Grosvenor-place, which might have fairly tasked one of George Robins's florescent advertisements to describe its merits;—Sir Charles had his hunters and a seat in Parliament—Lady Maria her opera-box and the family diamonds. The father lavished his tenderness upon two lovely little girls—and the mother wasted her solicitudes

upon the future heir of his house. Nor were these manifold advantages derived under ordinary circumstances of inheritance. By the special favour of destiny, the Willinghams had been sentenced to attain their flowery Eden by a briery path; they had been seated in the lavish lap of luxury by the admonitory hand of Penury herself.

It has been said that Providence marks its contempt of prosperity in the personages on whom it showers the gifts of fortune; but this is a vulgar error. Prosperity is too important a medium of human probation to be unwittingly conferred; and Satan, "grown wiser," quoth Pope, "than in the days of Job,"

> Tempts more by making rich than making poor!

Sir Charles and Lady Maria, although sinking under the weight of wealth and station, were the most discontented mortals in the world! I question whether their Chiswick murmurs had ever risen to such a clamorous pitch as that which marked their indignation on finding the claim of the Joseph Willinghams to all the Bank stock, consols, long annuities, India bonds

(East and West), canal shares, and tontines, standing in the name of the late Sir Claude—an unimpeachable right! Even Charles, who was a liberal-minded man and a generous brother, confessed that he considered his father's will an infamous document, reflecting equal discredit upon the testator and his legatee.

"Sir Claude must have been well aware of the nature of the entail," he observed to his equally irritated wife. "He was therefore perfectly acquainted with my incapability to make the smallest settlement on my poor girls, or to increase the dower of my wife beyond the paltry pittance assigned centuries ago to the Dowagers of the Willingham family. The rent-roll makes a splendid show, to be sure; but in these days of agricultural distress, a rent-roll is a piece of empty pomp, good only to decoy a man into an expenditure beyond his means. Heddeston Court, too, is so wretchedly out of repair, that I must instantly take up money to keep it from falling over our heads—and"

"Yes, yes: Joseph, with his views on the personalty, knew better than to let a mason, or a carpenter, or a plumber, come within sight of

the house. I was persuaded, Charles, when he insisted so strenuously on that fall of timber last autumn, that your father's will had passed through his hands, and that he was looking to the land-steward's balance."

"Oh, he never made any secret of his expectations; and had he been content to leave me a decent share of ready money, just to grease the wheels of this crazy old machine of an estate and keep us going, I should not have grudged my brother a becoming competence. However, he will find *my* feelings strangely altered towards him now;—if he thinks to play the Great Mogul at Heddeston any longer, he is plaguily mistaken. Terms of decent civility are all I wish to maintain with the Rectory. I dare say, now that I am in Parliament, he will be applying for my interest to advance his professional views. So great and so rich a man as Joseph, will not care to be addressed as anything less than *Mr. Dean.*"

"Dear Sophia would be a precious article for a Bishop's wife! Turning up her ruffles to carve the mutton, as if she were still at the head of her father's academical table! Your Par-

liamentary interest!—when you are literally obliged to maintain it by hiring a house in town at fifty per cent., which the least consideration on your father's part, or moderation on Joseph's, would have enabled you to make your own by a trifling purchase.—No, no! Mr. Joseph; *I* shall take care that our terms of civility with the Rectory are as cool as your own conduct."

To do Lady Maria justice, she maintained this declaration with unvarying consistency; but Sir Charles, although he still continued to grumble, could by no means coax his excellent disposition into any thing like a malicious rancour against his brother. He always contrived to find his way to the Rectory twenty minutes after his arrival at Heddeston; and although, with the terror of his wife before his eyes, he dared not openly convey to little Mary and little Charles any London tokens of their uncle's affection, he took care that the Highflyer should be put in requisition to deposit certain square brown compact paper parcels in their nursery, bearing the auspicious names of Edlin or of Izzard!

In one respect, indeed, he seemed resolved to disappoint his own anticipations; he never per-

mitted Joseph to make an application for his interest with the powers that were; and long before the immortal Nash had withdrawn from the modernized quadrangle of the Court the dapper clerk of the works delegated to inspect the progress of its architectural degradation, Archdeacon Willingham had found his way thither on the old shooting pony—for his five thousand a-year had afforded no addition to his stock—to moralize over his brother's profligate expenditure, and thank him for the unsolicited patronage which had already caused the Rectory to be visited with the dignities of the church.

But Lady Maria, although in the undisturbed possession of every luxury and joy of life which might be supposed to mollify the human heart towards its fellow creatures, was never known to repress a single iota of the detestation she had originally conceived against her sister-in-law: the best of patriots never *hated* so cordially as she did! A very trifling share of magnanimity, however, might have served to moderate her malice; for nature seemed to delight in confirming her triumph over Mrs. Joseph, and success should have secured her indulgence.

She saw her own daughters growing up into tall, elegant, accomplished girls, while Mary Willingham expanded into a gawkey, ungainly being, bearing singular corroboration, in personal appearance, of her Bodham descent; and the young heir of the Court was not more distinguished by his beauty and graceful demeanour, than was the unhappy Charles of the Rectory by his sneaking air and contracted countenance. The cousins, indeed, were seldom together; but when occasionally brought into comparison, it was "Hyperion to a satyr" in favour of the youthful beauties of the elder branch.

Fortune at length appeared to grow disgusted by the ungracious manner in which her benefits were acknowledged, and to desert the altars on which the incense of gratitude was so scantily offered. Lady Maria, who was exceedingly anxious for the birth of a second boy, became the mother, a year after her husband's accession to his title, to a third girl; and her only consolation under the disappointment was, that at the same time a similar dispensation was inflicted upon the Rectory. In truth, the grand motive for her anxiety to produce a younger son, was

to preclude the possibility of the rich living of Heddeston descending to Joseph's representatives. She was a thorough Graspall; and, like Napoleon, would scarcely have consented to become King of England, unless she could have been anointed Archbishop of Canterbury at the same time.

Sir Charles was, as usual, provokingly patient under the misfortune. He was satisfied that his new daughter would grow up as lovely and as intelligent as her sisters; and, choosing to fancy that she already bore a remarkable resemblance to her mother (whom, by a wonderful stretch of the imagination, he firmly believed to be the best of wives), he resolved that she should be christened *Maria*. The appellation was soon found to be productive of family confusion; and, in defiance of her baptismal rights, the youngest Miss Willingham was very soon endowed with the pet name of *Minnie*.

The next disaster, however, which befel the inmates of Heddeston Court, was of a far more serious nature; for it affected the most amiable member of the family, and the vital source of its united prosperity. Sir Charles, who had not

been deterred, by his senatorial honours or by his paternal gravity, from the indulgence of his original predilection for field sports, and "the credit of having a good horse in his stable," became at length a martyr to his passion. In the course of the autumn following the birth of his last daughter, a desperate fall in hunting sent him home senseless on the shoulders of four of his tenants; and although, for a long time, the Dodderwells of the country, and Sir Henrys from town, simultaneously pronounced his recovery to be impossible, he was reserved for a far more terrible destiny—he became a cripple for life!—To a "hunter of the hills," lingering years of sofas and inclined planes, liniments and friction, vials and decoctions, form but a prolongation of earthly torment!

It was fortunate for the amiable Sir Charles Willingham that the physical injury which produced this fatal effect upon his mortal frame was of a description equally calculated to enfeeble the mind. Extending its influence from the spine to the intellectual organs, his disorder finally reduced him to a state bordering on imbecility; and thus he was spared the bitter

mortification of seeing the adulatory attentions of his beloved Maria transferred to his son and heir; and the affections of his favourite girls bestowed upon that more efficient parent, who had become the sole arbiter of their pleasures and indulgences. But his powers of observation were materially weakened, and his taste for conversation of a rational kind so much impaired, that—provided little Minnie were left to spread her playthings beside his couch—he gave but trifling heed to the negligence of the rest of his family. It was a melancholy spectacle to look upon a man in the prime of life thus miserably reduced; and the more so, because, in spite of his excellent qualities and attaching character, the selfishness of his nearest relatives rendered them disgracefully indifferent about the matter. Everything at Heddeston Court went on as before; the same parties were invited, the same enjoyments prevailed. Lady Maria alternately audited the accounts, and presided over the festivities of the scene:—it was a bad example to show her son and heir; a detestable school to open to her daughters!

One of the few persons who cared to loiter in

the abandoned chamber of the gentle invalid, was Joseph Willingham's awkward son, who could not bring himself to forget the former kindness and encouragement he had received from his uncle; and which he now requited with such tokens of gratitude as a boy might offer—with patient society, fruit and flowers from his own garden, and a ready ministry to the whims and fancies of the motionless sufferer. Poor Sir Charles would lay his hand upon the urchin's sandy head with a vague consciousness of pleasure in his presence; and, next to little Minnie, it is probable that he loved him better than any thing in the world.

The young Claude, meanwhile, in all the intemperance of his youthful spirits, was destined to become aware, in a most irksome degree, of his rising importance in the family. The most eminent medical counsellors of the metropolis had decided that Sir Charles would remain for many years secure in his present state of semi-existence; during which period, Lady Maria, as guardian to the interests of her son, was fully justified in assuming the helm of state. She was well aware, however, that, should any dis-

aster interpose to deprive the family tree of this flourishing branch, the Archdeacon—I beg his pardon, he was now a Dean—would naturally assume the vigilance and authority of an heir presumptive: and Lady Maria, partial as she was, had never properly appreciated the value of her son, until such a contingency occurred to her mind.

From that hour the boy was doomed to a life of misery and privation. He might not ride, he might not bathe, he might not swing, he might not eat, he might not drink, save according to his mother's vigilant sanction; and, inheriting all his unlucky father's active propensities, these restrictions became insupportable. According to Lady Maria's nervous admonitions, waters were only made to drown, the earth to dislocate, the air to refrigerate into hopeless catarrhs. Food was a source of indigestion, sleep of apoplexy; there was no safety, save in universal self-denial and self-seclusion; and all the ills that flesh is heir to appeared, by her account, to concentrate their hostility against an eldest and an only son!—

> The grave did gape
> For him thrice wider than for other men.

His worthy uncle, the Dean, compassionating her maternal solicitude, or perhaps anxious to propitiate the future head of his house, was moved to an extraordinary exertion of generosity in favour of poor Claude. He actually bestowed upon him the old original shooting pony, which, in its foalhood, eighteen years before, had been appropriated by his father to his own use. "It was the steadiest old creature in the world."

Lady Monteagle, who was now—thanks to her daughter Margaret, and to Lady Maria's friendly intervention in her cause—the grandmother of a young Stapylford, and consequently somewhat versed in boyish sports and boyish perils—forewarned her amiable neighbour that the beast was lame, and that a stumbling pony was as dangerous as a restive horse. Mrs. Darnham even suggested, that the Very Reverend had his own ultimate views in the donation. But in fact, Joseph Willingham, with his usual explicit candour, had announced the "whole truth and nothing but the truth." "The pony," said he, "is no longer strong enough to carry *me*. I do not wish my son to contract a taste

for the stable—and it is therefore useless at the Rectory. Now at Heddeston Court, my dear Lady Maria, it will have the run of the park, and cost you little or nothing. And when it is too old for any thing else, why it will do to carry sand for the gardener."

King William the First, and King William the Third, of English history, are recorded to have been severally victims to stumbling horses; but another fate was reserved for young Claude Willingham. His mother's injudicious mode of training had not only redoubled his ardour for all the perilous sports of boyhood, but had debarred him from that very experience which might have diminished their dangers. He was no less sanguine than imprudent, and as unskilled as his very sisters could have been to enjoy the emancipation of a public school; and although by nature a vigorous, manly boy, he unfortunately became the victim of foolish maternal terrors! Before he had been two months at Eton, an accident in a boating party consigned him to a watery grave!—for Lady Maria had never been prevailed on to sanction his learning to swim!

Poor woman! Her heart was profoundly touched by this first chastisement of her pride! Independently of his heirship, she loved her son more than she had ever been tempted to love any breathing mortal but herself; and even old Lady Monteagle, could she have witnessed her first burst of maternal agony on the arrival of the fatal express, would have refrained from the selfish folly with which she exulted in her own superior wisdom, and in the frequent warnings she had bestowed upon her neighbour's injudicious precautions. "She always saw me give young Stapylford the run of the gamekeeper's lodges, and the command of my stable; but Lady Maria would take neither example nor advice."

Sir Charles appeared, at first, to be spared the worst consciousness of the loss he had sustained; for he listened to its announcement with that vague smile of imbecility, so awful on the countenance of a strong man in the prime of life. But when little Minnie came weeping to his arms in her black weeds, and when he saw himself surrounded by his accustomed attendants in their sable vesture, he gave a piteous

half-infantine shriek, which seemed to mark a sudden sensibility to the event. He asked no questions, however, and uttered no further lamentations. But he never held up his miserable head again; and within a month after the untimely death of his son, he was laid beside him in the family vault of the Willinghams!

If any thing could tend to increase the wretchedness of a wife and a mother thus suddenly bereaved, that of Lady Maria might very reasonably be aggravated by the knowledge that her three daughters were unprovided for—that she had nothing to expect from the liberality of Sir Joseph—and that her own jointure did not exceed twelve hundred a year! Her immediate anxiety was to quit the scene of her past glories and present mortification. Claudia was nearly thirteen, and Eleanor scarcely a year her junior. Both might derive considerable advantage by completing their education on the Continent; and she felt that she should escape the spectacle of Sophia's accession to the throne of Heddeston, by a temporary residence abroad. Now this proposition was a most unexpected relief to the mind of Sir Joseph; and partly moved by

gratitude, and partly by some natural feelings of regard towards his worthy brother's memory, he actually proposed to take charge during her absence of little Minnie, who was too young to be a pleasant travelling companion; and went the still further length of presenting his three nieces with a deed of annuity for a hundred pounds per annum apiece! Three hundred a year was an immense concession from a man like Joseph!

All these favours were reluctantly but graciously accepted by the humbled Lady Maria. Two months afterwards, she sailed for France with her two beautiful girls, deeply intent upon projects for their future aggrandizement; but thinking little of the child she left behind, or of the grave of that husband of her youth, who had loved and valued her so much beyond her deserts.

CHAPTER V.

Elle n'aime ni sa patrie, ni ses enfans, ni ceux qui lui ont donné le jour ; elle ne connoit d'autre parenté que la fortune.
Caractères de Dion Chrysostome.

It is astonishing with what facility selfish people can transfer such affections as they have to bestow, to the objects best calculated to advance their interests and favour their views. I have already acknowledged that, for twelve long years, Lady Maria Willingham had maintained an extraordinary insensibility towards her daughters; and that, without reference to their prior claim upon her maternal tenderness, she had remained indifferent to the expansion of Claudia's surpassing loveliness, and Eleanor's brilliant abilities. But scarcely had the grave closed upon her noble boy—upon the mainspring of all her hopes, and all her ambition—when the word "connexion," whispered in her ear by

old Lady Monteagle in the course of her first neighbourly visit of condolence, produced a singular revolution in the worldly mind of the calculating mother.

"I trust to your prudence, my dear Lady Maria," the sagacious Dowager had observed, "not to remain abroad *too* long. In four years your eldest girl will be presentable; and with her beauty, and the accomplishments she will acquire in her residence abroad, think what a *connexion* she may form in England—think what an advantage her early marriage may prove to the rest of her family."

It was Lady Maria's vidual cue to be silent and pensive; and howbeit she listened with startled consciousness, she continued to shake her well-frilled head, and to fix her downcast gaze upon her own weepers.

"For the sake of your helpless children, my dear friend," resumed Lady Monteagle, "you must learn to moderate your amiable sensibility, and to exert yourself. When I lost poor dear Lord M.—it is full thirty years ago, but I remember it as well as yesterday—I got into a sad, moping, nervous way; and my family phy-

sician, who saw the disadvantage it must be to four grown up daughters to have the spectacle of my hypochondriacism always before their eyes, ordered me to Bath, and prescribed a pint of mulled claret every evening before going to bed. My recovery was miraculous."

"Oh! my dear Lady Monteagle! you have never known what it is to be driven like an outcast from the scene of all your wedded happiness. Heaven knows that, with my children's society, a cottage and competence is all I require; but to forsake the spot where I have enjoyed the perfection of worldly felicity—where —where—" a white pocket-handkerchief, well applied, superseded a world of eloquence.

"Nay, my dearest Lady Maria—my excellent friend," remonstrated the Dowager, laying a skinny grasp upon her arm, "I cannot allow you to indulge in these fruitless reminiscences. It is true that your present trial is deeply afflicting"—she thought of her own comfortable jointure and comfortable dower-house, as she spoke —"but you must look forward to better times. What would have been your feelings, had you been left with three or four unprovided younger

sons hanging upon you, instead of those lovely girls?—I consider a handsome daughter as a sort of provision for the rest of her family."

"Alas! my dear friend, *you* have such a sanguine, active mind!—such a masculine understanding!—while I!—"

"You must rally yourself, and assume the fortitude becoming your position. Why now, just look at *my* Margaret; she was nothing compared with *your* girls, and see what a match she has made! She is at the head of London society—quite a leader of fashion—a first-rate establishment in town, and a palace you know in Northamptonshire. My girls had not a shilling; they had nothing but birth, and the devil's beauty—*youth;* but before Margaret had been married a year she managed to get off her eldest sister, who had forfeited even *that* claim to admiration—persuaded poor old gouty Sir Cecil Dynevour that she was the best manager in the world; and Marian is now a widow with twelve thousand a year at her own disposal. The other two girls, to be sure, have hung on hand; but as far as *I* am concerned they are as good as settled. Lady Stapylford has only that

one wild boy to occupy her attention; and whenever her Lord goes to Paris—which is pretty often—or forms a shooting-party on his fenny Cambridgeshire estates, Margaret has her sisters to keep her company during his absence. The rest of the year they usually make out with Lady Dynevour. Since my first daughter made so excellent a connexion, I do assure you that I have never once found myself obliged to pass a season in town at my own expense; and I predict that a day will soon come when *you* will find yourself profiting by the same advantages."

"Excellent connexion—good match—hang on hand—get off—make out—devil's beauty—leader of *ton*—jointure and settlements." Claudia and Eleanor Willingham, who had been loitering unperceived over an embroidering frame at the other end of the room, were considerably puzzled by these mysterious phrases. Neither the recollected precepts of their discarded governess, nor the folio edition of Johnson's Dictionary—to which they speedily applied for enlightenment—tended to develop the enigma. They little imagined the long apprenticeship they were about to serve to the horrible calling,

of which these words may be regarded as the initiatory cabala; they little suspected that their future destiny was comprehended in the rapid impression produced on the mind of their mother by Lady Monteagle's seemingly incomprehensible harangue. When she rang for her carriage, they simply but silently hailed her departure as a relief from a bore; they knew not to what future bitterness of heart they had been devoted by her prospective counsels. For the present, indeed, they felt only grateful to her for her friendly promises; for she had undertaken to keep an inquisitorial eye upon little Minnie's position in the household of her uncle, and to report progress in a close correspondence. They loved their sister dearly;—every one loved Minnie! (except her mother.) But she was only five years old—was already extremely attached to her cousins Charles and Mary; and they felt that she would probably be happier, and certainly far better off by remaining in her early home, with her own nurse, and pets, and garden to amuse her, than by rambling over France and Italy in search of economy and education with the rest of the family.

With this impression on their minds, the adieus of the elder sisters were as little tinctured with pain or apprehension as those of Minnie herself; who found in their promise of a speedy return all the consolation her little heart required for its first transient tears. Succeeding days, and weeks, and months fortunately tended to confirm their flattering anticipations of her welfare: every letter which reached the travellers from the county of Kent—including the tall straight formal Italian specimen of Dowager penmanship, which emanated from Monteagle Park—the diffuse and minute epistles in which Sir Joseph set forth his proceedings towards his niece, his estate, and the world in general—and the well-sprawled sheet of foolscap over which the good-natured hand of Charles Willingham was wont to guide that of his little cousin into sundry details respecting nurse Worley's rheumatism, and her own favourite dormice—bore witness to Minnie's happiness, and to the kindness of her uncle and aunt.

With Lady Willingham—for Miss Bodham had now progressed into that sublime supremacy—this kindness was at present exhibited

in a passive form. She was at present equally debarred from interfering with Minnie's pleasures, and from enjoying those which her new dignities might have been supposed to heap upon her head. The daughter whose birth had been coeval with that of Lady Maria's last rejected pledge, proved to be a most unfortunate object; miserably deformed, and scarcely less deficient in the powers of the mind than of the body. Yet such is the merciful influence of nature upon a mother's heart, that all the maternal solicitudes of Lady Willingham appeared concentrated in her tender watchfulness over this helpless little being. She had wisely counselled her husband to give up the lease of that splendid mansion in Grosvenor Place, which she regarded as an unappeasable Mammoth that had swallowed up what ought to have been appropriated to savings for daughters' portions by his predecessor.

But the advantages of London medical advice soon prompted her to suggest the purchase of another. The first time that the mighty family waggon—on whose frontal the christian name of Joseph had been freshly interposed instead of that of

Charles, between *Sir* and *Willingham, Bart.*— rumbled with its well-hayed burden along the London road, its unwieldy progress originated no longer in Parliamentary duties, or in projects of frivolous pleasure. Lady Willingham would have cared little for the London season, had it not afforded her an opportunity of placing her little afflicted child in the hands of one of those barbarous charlatans, who do not hesitate to affix their torturing irons upon limbs already wasted by the approach of death; or to promise "the benefits of their system" to a frame on which the work of mortal decomposition is already half begun. A sanguine mother is easily deluded by promises so specious; and any one who had looked upon Sophia's eager countenance as it became irradiated by the flattering declarations of the impostor, would have instantly forgiven her all her vulgarity and all her meanness. A good and tender mother is a glorious being. Yes! the ex-Bodham was worth fifty Lady Marias!

It was probably to her cotemporaneous sympathy with the dying child, that Minnie was principally indebted for her aunt's extraordinary

partiality and indulgence. I have said, indeed, that every body loved her: she was one of those buoyant, joyous beings whose presence—like the irradiation of a living sunbeam—confers an indefinite consciousness of pleasure; whose smile and voice and endearments find an unerring way to the heart. She was lovely, it is true, and graceful and intelligent as a child might be; but it was neither her beauty, grace, nor talent which wrought the spell; it was all these, combined with an utter guilelessness of soul—with a total absence of that selfishness which so often deteriorates the caresses of childhood. But she had still another and a surpassing charm in the eyes of Lady Willingham. Accustomed, through her infant companionship with her own father, to the sight of physical misfortune, and to the task of soothing its irritations, her little gladsome footsteps became insensibly moderated as she approached the sick chamber of her cousin, and her little voice hushed into the gentleness becoming its stagnant atmosphere. She would devise a thousand inventions for the amusement of the invalid, or sit for hours in watchful tranquillity beside her

couch, while the mother permitted herself to snatch some hasty interval of repose or refreshment; and of all the persons ministering to her aid or comfort, it was Minnie alone whom the sufferer appeared to recognize with grateful pleasure.

Mary Willingham, the elder daughter, was a personage wholly incapable of these kindly demonstrations. She was a girl of singular endowments, of a reflective turn of mind, of strong principles and excellent disposition; but her faults were those of undeniable inheritance. She was demure—calm even to apparent insensibility—and reserved beyond the sanguine prompting of her girlish years. Sharing the general predilection in favour of the adopted inmate of her father's house, she had eagerly bestowed her protection and solicitude and instruction upon little Minnie;—but without endearing the gift by a single fond expression. She would have considered such an indulgence of her feelings as indelicate and unbecoming. She was, in short, a formal, matter-of-fact kind of girl; fulfilling the duties of her education—reverencing her parents, and obeying her

governess; but beyond this automatous mode of existence, she did not appear to cherish a single natural impulse.

Her brother Charles, the heir expectant to all the dignities of Heddeston—dignities which, under the present dynasty, were reinforced by the command of considerable monied independence—appeared to be only a refrigerated edition of his impassive sister. In a boy, too, this defect of feeling—this moral ossification of the heart—showed with thrice double deformity; it amounted to an air of sullen selfishness: and the apparent indifference with which both the one and the other withheld their participation from Lady Willingham's anxious exertions in favour of her crippled child, was pretty generally attributed to a mean jealousy of her maternal partiality. Mrs. Darnham even went so far as to insinuate to her confidantes of the neighbourhood, that Mr. Charles's unusual devotion to his little cousin, arose from an amiable desire to pique and retaliate upon the absurd predilection of his mother.

At length, as might have been reasonably desired by all parties, the afflicted child was re-

leased from its mortal thraldom; and Mary and Charles addressed themselves to the task of soothing Lady Willingham's grief with amiable and unostentatious, but ill-directed sympathy. Sir Joseph made divers prolonged harangues to his family upon the duty of submitting, without a murmur, to the dispensations of Providence, which might have suited the birth of the little cripple better than its decease; with every other possible variation of common-place, peculiar to this species of domestic calamity. He assured them that he felt the loss of his daughter to be a sort of counterbalance to the prosperity of his worldly affairs; and having assembled all the domestics of the family, he favoured them with a long and pertinent address upon the brevity and uncertainty of human existence. As Sir Joseph uttered his moralities in a serious and measured voice, and was attired in a customary suit of solemn black, even the foolish, fat scullion herself regarded it as subordinate and dutiful to melt into tears. But certain of the grey-headed coadjutors of Dickinson and Co. could by no means persuade themselves to take warning by the premature fate of their master's un-

fortunate babe; and many of the matrons of the family secretly determined that the brevity of human existence could not have been more satisfactorily exemplified than on the present occasion.

His son and daughter endured his prolixity with their usual respectful submission; and Lady Willingham, long accustomed to his diffuse platitudes, refrained not from her tears at the instigation of Sir Joseph's homily. But little Minnie did much towards her consolation. She would sit with her, book on knee, in silent companionship within the lonely chamber endeared by so many mournful remembrances; or stroll out with her, hand in hand, towards Heddeston church, the sight of which refreshed with renewed tears the memory of her child.

Nor did the lapse of years weaken or destroy this intimate association; she still remained in Lady Willingham's eyes a living memento of what little Sophia could, or should, or might have become; and although, as Mary slowly outgrew the authority of the governess, her little cousin was duly consigned to the place she had vacated, Minnie Willingham remained the especial dar-

ling and *protegée* of her aunt. Her own daughter was seventeen, and Charles had already risen to some eminence at Eton; yet neither of them had proved or exhibited one moment's envy of the favour bestowed upon their cousin.

From Lady Maria, meanwhile, the most satisfactory letters were periodically received; and nothing could be more plausibly devised than the motives suggested for the prolongation of her residence on the Continent. Financial foresight—an anxiety to accomplish her daughters under the hands of the first masters at an inconsiderable cost—a desire, by present economy, to render their future *debût* in England more brilliant than her available means might command—induced her, she wrote, to forego the company of her beloved little Maria, and to trespass thus unreasonably upon the hospitality of Heddeston Court in her favour. She depicted herself as a martyr to maternal duty; as renouncing her beloved country, the society of her nearest relatives, the sight of a spot associated with hallowed reminiscences of conjugal happiness, for the sake of her elder girls; pathetically lamenting, at the same time, that her narrow income debarred her

from the valued privilege of bestowing upon them that solid English education, those excellent principles—instilled and actively exemplified—of rigid English morality, which so well become, and so powerfully sustain, the domestic firesides of our own happy island! "

Sir Joseph, from a fellow-feeling, warmly applauded this well-worn clap-trap. But Lady Willingham, naturally lynx-eyed, and sharpened into fierce acuteness by feelings of rivalry and personal aversion, permitted herself to compare the tendency of these pathetic Jeremiades, with a more natural statement of the case as it flowed from the undesigning pens of Claudia and Eleanor, in their letters to their little sister and their cousin Mary.

On their first arrival at Paris, these letters, indited in a flowing English hand, and with an exuberance of girlish spirits, set forth nothing but their ecstasies at the enchanting novelties by which they were surrounded; and it might plainly be discerned that Lady Maria, despite her widow's weeds of only six months' standing, by no means suffered either herself or her daughters to be overwhelmed with the mono-

tony of woe. She was either unconscious of, or indifferent to, the strict formalities observed on such occasions in France; where it is esteemed a violation of all decorum for a person in family mourning to be seen at any public place.

By degrees, the flowing caligraphy of English penmanship became cramped with the perpendicularity, and curly-tailed z, and s, and r, of the minute handwriting of France; while the style it served to convey—began to expand into that luxuriant fervency of address which characterizes the epistolary correspondence of our ardent neighbours. In another year, it grew deformed with Gallicisms; in another, it found its way into downright French; and, in the course of a fourth, their residence of a few months in Italy enabled both Claudia and her sister to affect something of a polyglot text.

Still their letters remained extremely amusing, and lively, and natural. It was clear that in spite of the toils of their education—in spite of the music, singing, painting, and Babel-like confusion of tongues of which they complained as a daily infliction—they were made the constant

companions and excuse of all their mother's dissipation. Thirty thousand francs per annum form a respectable income on the Continent; and during a season at Florence, and two winters at Naples, Lady Maria found herself enabled to maintain both an equipage and a table, after the fashion of the place. During the Carnival, they spoke of their gaieties as unceasing. At one time there was a masked ball, from which the English Ambassadress would not hear of their absence; at another, their Mamma had been prevailed on to let them fill some juvenile parts in amateur theatricals. Their Parisian experience was of such high account in *proverbes*, *charades*, and *tableaux*, that on such occasions they could not be spared. In short, upon some plea or other, they appeared to have found their way into society at an age when the nursery or the school-room should have been the shelter of their inexperience; and they anticipated being presented and "coming out" in England, while it was evident that for some time past they had never been *in*.

At length, the long-appointed period arrived! Claudia, who was now eighteen, and who had

conditioned that her sister should make her first appearance in London the same season with herself, wrote to announce their immediate arrival. A house was taken for them in a third-rate situation, such as Lady Maria's limited income might justify; and Minnie, who had accompanied her uncle and aunt to their own formal mansion in Grosvenor-square, to await the event, had at length the gratification of a picturesque embrace from her long absent mother, and a thousand fervent and tearful caresses from her two lovely sisters.

Lady Willingham was duly and appropriately thanked; Mary was presented with her set of Roman mosaic and Neapolitan coral; and Sir Joseph's hand was affectionately squeezed by the grateful Lady Maria. As she looked round, however, upon the humble comforts of an abode which the recent habitation of an Italian palace and a Parisian hotel endowed with a somewhat homely air, she could not but think that her brother-in-law might have seized on so auspicious an occasion as that of the *entrée* of his nieces into society, to expand into something of a more liberal vein. It would have been so easy

for him to engage, on his own account, a house for the season more becoming to the name of Willingham, and more advantageous to the views of the fair *débutantes*. There is nothing so injudicious as to fight in a matrimonial skirmish under ensigns of poverty.

CHAPTER VI.

What are these wondrous civilizing arts—
This Roman polish?

Addison.

"WELL, dear Mamma?" exclaimed Claudia to Lady Maria, having elevated her glass to take a deliberate survey of the apartments, immediately on the departure of Sir Joseph and his family.

"Well, my dear girls! can you conceive any thing more mortifyingly beggarly than the whole affair?"

"And this," observed Eleanor, drawing her chair towards the fire-place, and establishing her feet after a fashion which might have evoked the shade of her grandsire from the Heddeston vault—"And this is the sea-coal fire—the *com-*

fortable chimney-corner—for which I have so often heard you sigh in Italy!—These are the snug rooms I have heard you regret!—This blanket of dingy woollen is the capital carpet, the remembrance of which rendered our clean and well-waxed *parquets* insupportable! I wish you joy, dear Mamma, of your inauguration among all these blessings; but not without feeling some little surprise at the preference."

"Oh! you must not compare the attractions of dirty London lodgings with those of our excellent mansion in Grosvenor-place, or with the comforts of Heddeston. All this I acknowledge to be detestable; and did I imagine, my dear girls, that you were likely to find your permanent homes of the same degraded and miserable character, I should not hesitate to fly back to Paris with greater speed than that which brought us hither. Mediocrity in England is a worse than insupportable destiny; and the luxuries assigned to poverty itself on the Continent, offer a far preferable alternative. But believe me also, that there exists no station in life, from one end of Europe to the other, which will bear comparison with the splendour and refinement of the

highest class of English society;—in which, before long, I trust to see you both advantageously placed."

"I fear you are too sanguine. At Paris and in Naples, success in society is far more easily attained than I can believe it to be in this wide wilderness of London, where there are so many formidable competitors."

"My dear Eleanor!—every thing will depend upon yourselves. With a little management on your parts, and vigilance on mine, there is every probability that you will both make excellent matches. Your connexions on both sides are excellent;—you have just as much beauty and accomplishment as is requisite for attraction;—the English connexions and friendships you have formed abroad are all in your favour;—and you have been preceded here by the reputation of having refused several good matches in Italy."

"Thanks to your generalship, Mamma!—I am convinced that both the Duca di Alcastora, and Claudia's Piedmontese Prince, were satisfied by your style of living that we had very tolerable fortunes; and that, on their enlightenment, the preliminaries of either marriage would

not have proceeded far. On the profit-and-loss-alliance-system of the Continent, we could never, in fact, have formed even a respectable connexion among foreigners."

"A principal motive for my return to England —the only European land of disinterested love! In France you must have expected, at best, to be chosen by way of '*ménagères*'—to inspect the *lessive* and *confitures*."

"I really feel at present," observed the indolent Claudia, looking round the dingy and dismantled chamber, "as if I should prefer the *lessive*, and all its domestic accompaniments of joyous gaiety, to the atmosphere of this desolate England. I am positively chilled into a moral ague."

"Patience! my dear child! patience!—To-morrow every thing will wear a different aspect. A few flowers placed about the room will enliven it beyond your recognition; then we can strew all these unmeaning tables with your *étrennes* of the year—with our new caricatures—and a few Neapolitan novelties, which will attract the gaping curiosity of our visitors—and will serve, like a showy domino on an ugly woman, to dis-

guise the nakedness of the land. Oh! it will all do very well in a day or two;—before I send round my cards, and sound my tocsin to the little circle of exclusive fashion by which I intend to surround myself, all will go well."

"Don't you think Minnie is growing very pretty, Mamma?" inquired Claudia with a yawn.

"You must remember, my dear, that you saw her in contrast with Mary Willingham; who remains, as she ever was, a flagrant instance of the awkwardness of "nature's journeymen." When Minnie is once settled at home, depend on it, we shall find her full of awkward Missishness: she only looked pretty to-night, because she was flushed and animated by our arrival."

"Oh! pardon me!" interrupted Eleanor. "Her features are extremely delicate, and her figure slight, and well-turned, and graceful. I was most agreeably surprised; and could not refrain from expressing the feeling to Mary, who replied that she was the most interesting little girl in the world. I almost forgave her own awkwardness, she seemed so unaffectedly fond of poor Minnie."

"I detest interesting little girls!" exclaimed Lady Maria pettishly; "and I am only too sure that we shall find her miserably *de trop* in our arrangements; for she is too old to be left with the servants, and I cannot afford a governess. However, even if the Willinghams were inclined to keep her—which evidently they are *not*—it would have a very strange appearance were I to leave her longer in their hands. Therefore, all things considered, I think I shall look out for a school on a limited scale, where I can send her to be safe, and out of the way."

Poor Minnie! And it was to the return of relations such as these she had looked with such confiding affection;—it was of the caresses of this calculating mother, of these critical sisters, she had been dreaming for months, and only waking to anticipations of a yet more fervent reality.—Poor little Minnie!—Her disappointment was great indeed; and when she returned home from her first chilling interview with her nearest relations, her sleepless pillow—and seldom is the pillow of childhood sleepless—was visited by sore misgivings for the future, by many self-rebukings for the ingrati-

tude which had hitherto withheld her unqualified affection from those, under whose fosterhood her recent years had passed so happily, so fearlessly away. She had scarcely allowed her little heart to indulge, to the full extent of its wishes, her love for Charles and Mary, her gratitude towards Sir Joseph and her aunt. She had checked herself repeatedly by those watch-words of duty, "My *own* mother—my *own* sisters;" and now, when she found that mother and those sisters so moderately inclined to sanction her eager claims, she could no longer venture to bestow her rejected affections upon the objects from whom she had previously laboured to estrange the gift.

Minnie was only fourteen years old, and was by no means endowed with a precocity of worldly wisdom; but she had sense and sensibility enough to regard with terror her approaching removal from a home wherein she had been so long and so indulgently domesticated. She had too just and too amiable a sense of things to interrogate Charles and Mary—on all other occasions her oracles and bosom counsellors—touching their opinion of the conduct of her own family, or

her prospects of happiness; she was fully conscious that the topic should remain sacred to her lips and ears.

A single week, passed in Seymour-street, served but to confirm Minnie Willingham's apprehensions and painful recoil upon herself. She experienced the daily and vexatious trial of hearing the friends she so tenderly esteemed, and who had in fact so worthily won the gratitude of her heart, held up to the most unsparing ridicule. Her sister Eleanor was an admirable mimic; and her delineations of Lady Willingham's prim self-concentration, of Sir Joseph's diffuse and common-place prose, appeared to form the sole amusement of their dull family re-union. Even this, Minnie might have taught herself to endure; but when she saw Mary—her dear and indulgent cousin Mary—pourtrayed with all the twitchings of her habitual nervousness, with the miraculously awkward gait which her timidity assumed before strangers, and with the blush and struggling speech which had prefaced her replies to the invidious questions of her cousins—she could not repress her honest indignation. It

was in vain, however, that she put forth a claim to forbearance, in Mary's affectionate protection of herself; it was in vain she urged against their satires that Mary, in spite of her *gaucherie*, was in truth remarkably accomplished and well-informed.

"*Il se peut qu'elle ne manque pas d'instruction*," replied Eleanor; "but the word accomplishment embraces a wide field; and I tell you the poor girl is a mere savage. I have no doubt she has been brought up according to the most approved system of the Bodhamites; but I tell you she is a savage."

"Mary has had the best masters in London, for several years past. She is a scientific musician, paints in oils, is mistress of French and German——"

"All which tends to justify my declaration—that she is a savage! Science in amateur music is decidedly barbarous; oil-painting is an unseemly and impertinent pretension on the part of a female artist; and as to her qualifications as a linguist,

> She speaks the French of Stratford school, by Bow—
> The French of Paris she did never know,

and a woman of fashion might as well talk Iroquois as German. Yes, Mary Willingham is decidedly, and upon the most approved principles—a savage.

"Poor cousin Mary! had she passed a year or two in the land where poodles are taught to dance, and cooks and hair-dressers are termed artists, no doubt she would have a better title to your approbation," cried Minnie, stung to the quick by the malicious comments of her sisters. But this imprudent sally sealed her own destiny. Lady Maria affected to be shocked by her flippancy and insubordination; and within a week, the seminary "on a limited scale" was hastily selected; Minnie and her trunks were securely deposited there as animate and inanimate lumber, which might very well be spared from Seymour-street; while her mother and sisters began to enjoy, unmolested, their own witty enmity against her former benefactors.

Lady Willingham, meanwhile, was particularly gratified by this apparent alteration in her young *protegée's* destiny. Despite the icy listlessness of her middle age, she was not an un-

observant woman; prosperity and adversity had equally tended to soften her heart; the brilliancy of her position in life had served to expand the original narrowness of her mind; the faults of her youthful temper were somewhat moderated, and she had already detected so much that was mischievous in the character of her sister-in-law, so much that was objectionable in the acquired tone of her nieces, that she rejoiced to know her little favourite was secure, for the present, from the evil influence of their example.

Mary, however, was more charitable, or less discerning. She was wonderfully impressed with the elegance and graces of her travelled cousins; and was herself of so ingenuous and liberal a disposition, that it never occurred to her to suspect the existence of inferior qualities beneath so specious a surface. Modestly, though silently, conscious of her own personal defects, she admired their beauty, their foreign graces, their trifling accomplishments, nor deemed it possible that they could have been left wholly ignorant, in all those unavailing branches of education which were likely to

remain inostensible. Eleanor, indeed, who was gifted with brilliant abilities, had contrived to pick up some curious stores of general information in an unchecked course of desultory reading; but Claudia, with her music and her miniatures, her melting Roman intonation, and her polished Parisian idiom, remained a dunce of the first water. As to moral principle, both were equally in a state of mental darkness. To form good connexions, maintain a good appearance in society on small means, and obtain the greatest portion of amusement for the least possible quantity of sordid expenditure, were the only duties hitherto inculcated by the maternal instructions of Lady Maria.

"I really wonder," observed Sir Joseph Willingham to his lady, as he sat sipping a fiery vinous decoction called Port, some weeks after the arrival of his late brother's family, "that Lady Maria, with her very limited income, should have made up her mind to settle in London. I can understand her finding herself thoroughly tired of the dirty comfortless ways of the Continent; but I should really have thought that Bath or Brighton, or Cheltenham, or some

cheap watering place, where amusement may be had at a reasonable rate, and no horses are required, would have far better suited her purpose: but, as I always say, it is useless to attempt deciding on the views of other people."

"Oh! as to Lady Maria's views, they are far more evident than easy to influence. London is the most profitable matrimonial market, and London must therefore forward her speculations, at any cost."

"But my nieces might have made a very comfortable match at Brighton. She herself picked up my brother at Ramsgate."

"Considering her moderate jointure, and her daughters' want of fortune, I doubt whether Lady Maria considers her own marriage a favourable precedent. For her girls, at all events, she entertains much higher pretensions; and she is so far justifiable, that they certainly boast a degree of beauty and elegance such as, in her best days, never fell to *her* share. I suspect she intends them to form very splendid alliances; to effect which, she has certainly chosen the most advantageous ground."

"Why yes," said Sir Joseph, looking com-

placently round his gloomy dining-room, "all men of distinction may certainly be found in the metropolis at one time or other of the year: and they are right—they would otherwise exile themselves beyond the limits of the spread of knowledge and the march of intellect. Do you know, my dear Sophia, if *I* were to remain at Heddeston myself all the year round, I really think I should end with becoming a very dull fellow."

Lady W. sneered over her dried cherries; while Mary, after playing with her spoon a minute or two, to disguise her embarrassment, observed, "And Lady Maria has so many personal connexions in town, so many noble relatives, who will of course assist in forwarding her views!"

"When her little girl was left isolated in England, I never perceived that any of her Ladyship's illustrious clan troubled themselves to show her the least civility, unless it were old General De Vesci and his somniferous wife; and I am sure, during poor Sir Charles's time, Heddeston Court used to be filled from September till March with nothing but De Vescis and Lorimers."

"Lorimers?"

"Old Lady De Vesci was a Lorimer."

"Any relation to Charles's Eton friend?"

"Grand aunt, I believe."

"Ah! I dare say she will find all these people civil enough as far as occasionally chaperoning her daughters, or giving them opera tickets, or the pattern of a dress," said Sir Joseph.

"Or lending their carriage to Lady Maria," significantly interposed Lady Willingham, with an interrogatory glance at her husband.

"If you mean, Sophia, that her Ladyship is likely to consider *mine* at her disposal, I beg to observe that she deceives herself altogether. If she chooses to gratify her own vanity by settling in London on fifteen hundred a year, (for I leave her the full allowance for my three nieces, although I undertake Minnie's school-expenses as if she were a child of our own)——"

"And so she *is*," said both Lady W. and Mary, in a low tone.

"Why it is solely her own affair. In that three hundred a year she must be aware that I have done my utmost—ay! and as the father of a family, more than many would have done,

considering the slights she marked towards us all during Sir Claude's and Sir Charles's life-time. I trust I understand my duty towards the widow of my brother," continued Sir Joseph, solemnly, "and I trust I have strength of mind faithfully to fulfil it; but as to having my horses out night and day to please her, it is a thing I will never do—*never!* I consider it incumbent upon every man—more especially one who has officiated as a Christian minister—to be unceasing in his tender mercies towards the brute creation. What is it Cowper says ——"

"Never mind what Cowper says; in this instance your own opinions and determination are far more to the purpose."

"Well, my dear! *my* determination is that *you* may take Lady Maria or my nieces out shopping whenever it suits you (except into the City or the Strand of a Monday, on account of scratching the carriage against the market waggons); but if she should ever take the liberty of applying for my equipage as an independent loan, you will have the goodness to reply, that it is entirely against my principles to distress my horses: and you may add, Sophia—"

he looked askance over his wine glass to see how the assertion *took* with his spouse—" that I am tolerably positive in my opinions, when they have been once seriously formed. You know I refused Mary and yourself the gratification of the Wenster archery meeting last year, because Anthony thought the horses wanted physicking, and that the pull was too great."

"Very true," replied Lady Willingham mildly, and with a full remembrance that the objection had arisen entirely on her *own* part. "But you need not make yourself prematurely uneasy, my love, for the De Vescis have taken a house in Portman-square to be near Lady Maria; and you know the General has a superb set of horses, and several carriages, and——"

"Mighty absurd! for his fortune at the utmost is ten thousand a year! which does not go far, where there is a place in the country, a borough, and a house in town to be kept up. To be sure the General is not a family man, which *I* find to my cost makes a considerable difference in one's calculations."

"Then old Lady Monteagle is in town this

year, with her daughter Lady Dynevour. They have both carriages, and can occupy but one."

"Ay, ay! But you will find that neither of them will be very solicitous to lend the other to Lady Maria Willingham. You women understand one another's manœuvres so well;—you know so perfectly what it is to keep a pair of wretched horses shivering in the cold, while you are tumbling over drawers of ribbons which you never intend to buy, and matching silks which you have already purchased at some other shop;—to say nothing of hearing them cough in the street half the night, while you are finishing your toilet, or engaged with a last half hour of scandal at some Dowager's rout." Sir Joseph chuckled, for he felt that he had been more than commonly witty and eloquent.

"And then, you know, Sophia, an old woman like Lady Monteagle is always under the dominion of a parcel of grey-headed servants; and you are well aware that her ladyship no more dare ask either of her drunken footmen, or her fat coachman, to go out at night, than she

dare venture herself. It is not every one who is so thoroughly the master of his establishment as *I* am."

"Very true, my dear. By the way, Mary, what did your brother's last letter say about young Stapylford?—How has he got out of his last scrape?—I met Lady Monteagle this morning in Seymour-street, who was very anxious to learn how her grandson had escaped."

"As usual, no doubt, upon other people's shoulders," observed Sir Joseph.

"I fancy papa is right," replied Mary, mildly. "Charles's account of the business is so very confused, so different from his usual clear style of letter-writing, that I am persuaded Mr. Stapylford was rescued in this instance, as he has often been before, by my brother and Lorimer uniting to pay the damage. Lord Stapylford is so very shabby with his son, that it would be useless to apply at home on such occasions."

"I wonder what Charles, or any one else, sees to like in that young man?"

"It often surprises *me*," said Mary. "He is continually disgracing himself by some mad-cap

folly or other; and yet the wisest and most amiable of his companions always appear willing to become a sacrifice for him."

"I am glad to hear *you* talk so of Mr. Stapylford, my dear Mary," said Sir Joseph, with an air of paternal authority. "I have sometimes doubted whether I were quite wise in having such a wild young man so much at Heddeston."

"*Young man!* my dear papa!" exclaimed Mary, with a blush; "Stapylford is a year younger than my brother, and two years younger than Lorimer or myself. I do not believe he is sixteen till next year. If there is any thing to fear, it is for poor Minnie; you know he always calls her his little wife."

"Yes, while he provokes her by cutting off her doll's head, or her spaniel's ears."

"I think the 'little wife' system a very bad one," said Sir Joseph solemnly. "If the alliance is really eligible, that sort of premature notice is always sure to put a stop to it; and it only serves, when the girl and boy are grown up, to embarrass them in each other's presence. I remember, when I was a stripling, Lady Monteagle always per-

sisted in calling her daughter Margaret *my* little wife; and long after I was engaged to you, Sophia, my father used to make Miss Margaret and myself stand up together, to see which of the young couple was the tallest. Now, do you know, I cannot help fancying that Lady Stapylford blushes whenever I speak to her to this very day."

Lady Willingham, who was well aware that the fair Margaret—a thorough-going Almack's woman of fashion—had not blushed for twenty years, to be visible through her rouge, and who was by no means fond of hearing her own clandestine engagement alluded to in her daughter's presence, took this *historiette* as a cue for removal to the drawing-room, leaving Sir Joseph to deposit his long thin legs on the marble chimney-piece, in a meditative attitude, becoming the anxious after-dinner solitude of "a father of a family." At present his thoughts were exclusively occupied in conjecturing by what means Lady Maria Willingham and her daughters had become so extremely intimate with the Duke of Lisborough as to be invited to Calmersfield for the ensuing Easter holi-

days;—with an occasional stray digression towards the choice of a private tutor for his son Charles, who had recently removed from Eton to Oxford.

CHAPTER VII.

It is one thing to understand persons, and another thing to understand matters; for many are perfect in men's humours, that are not greatly capable of the real parts of business, which is the constitution of one who hath studied men more than books. *Bacon's Essays.*

In the Duke of Lisborough's intimacy with the family of his late brother, there was, however, nothing that need have puzzled the comprehension of so sagacious a person as Sir Joseph Willingham. His Grace was a frequent traveller; had sojourned repeatedly in Paris, Florence, Rome, and Naples, during Lady Maria's settlement in those cities. He found her current in the very best society of each; he knew her to be as well connected as himself, and, in some remote degree, with himself; and, moreover, during their more recent acquaint-

ance, he had discovered her to be the mother of two lovely girls—elegant, accomplished, fascinating—every thing in short which his bachelor predilections could desire. It was very natural that he should rejoice to hear they were about to settle in their native country; it was still more so that he should express a hope of seeing them frequently at Calmersfield Park. He had, in short, a long arrear of hospitality to repay to Lady Maria.

But the worthy proprietor of Heddeston Court was by no means the only person to whom the ensuing Easter visit afforded matter of surprise and speculation. The Duke of Lisborough had a married brother and a widowed sister, who kept vigilant watch and ward over the female arrivals at Calmersfield; and as both were equally British fixtures, and equally unversed in the fashionable currency of the Continent, neither Lord Robert Lorton nor Lady Grayfield were at first prepared to admit Lady Maria's justifiable claims to the attentions of their illustrious kinsman. No sooner had they managed to discover that she had two daughters, very handsome and very poor, than

some degree of indignation mingled with their astonishment; but, as they had ascertained at the same time that Lady Maria was a De Vesci, their own distant kinswoman, they perceived that it would be impossible, or indecent, to manœuvre her out of her invitation. The poor Duke very naturally, but very superfluously, believed himself to be master of his own house. But this is a domestic point on which others, besides Sir Joseph Willingham, are apt to deceive themselves.

Meanwhile, Lady Maria, unsuspicious of the consternation excited by her approach, proceeded to weave her plots in utter unconsciousness of the Argus eyes which waited on their development. At the appointed period, Mademoiselle Céline contrived to adjust in a capacious imperial the *bérets* and *chapeaux parés de Miladi,* without infringing on the more important claims of the young ladies' ball-dresses and *canezous*—exquisite in their elaborate simplicity. Their newest music, including a *Romance à deux voix,* composed for them by Blangini, and a Mazurka, with an impossible name, forwarded to them at Paris by some Polish Count—their

ex-cavaliere of a former season—was duly deposited in its golden-hinged morocco portfolio; while their mother-of-pearl work-boxes were furnished with unfinished specimens of *broderie*, whose delicacy might have brought down on either fair Arachne the vengeance of Minerva;—unless the suggestions of one of their most beloved and confidential friends were correct—that these *chef d'œuvres* of the needle had been purchased of an indigent *brodeuse* of the *Rue Vivienne.*

Certain it was, that during their residence at Calmersfield, not a single leaf, not the petal of a flower, was added to the performance; but then the Miss Willinghams were in such popular request! They were always wanted in the music-room, or the ball-room, or the billiard-room; to-day the Duke insisted upon driving Claudia through the neighbouring villages in his *droski;* to-morrow Eleanor was selected as the companion of a "capability" walk, to decide upon the site of a kiosk, which it was his intention to construct in an elevated position of the gardens. Sometimes he had a cabinet of cameos to display—for what English

nobleman escapes from Rome unbitten by epidemic connoisseurship, and unduped by the cognoscenti?—Sometimes, on a rainy day, a new cotillon was to be practised in the dancing-gallery; and one or other of Lady Maria's daughters was sure to be selected as his partner.

The girls themselves, with all that sanguine expectation and fearless enjoyment of passing pleasure, which is co-existent only with extreme youth, valued his preference solely for the amusement and variety it insured to them in their daily pursuits; and even Lady Maria presumed not to hazard a hope that all this favour and intimacy would tend to any further advantage than a *début* in London of especial brilliancy. She was well aware that Calmersfield had long been regarded as a sort of *conservatoire* of fashion—an university of *ton*, wherein young ladies might take degrees, calculated to maintain their future reputation in the *beau monde;* and she was duly anxious that the honours thus attained by her accomplished daughters, should be of the highest order. But neither Lady Grayfield nor Lord Robert gave her credit for this compulsory modera-

tion; they believed her to be intent on crowning her fair offspring with strawberry-leaves rather than with laurel!

Claudia and Eleanor, meanwhile, even had they been aware of the mistrustful and angry feelings thus excited against them, would have still maintained that courteous and buoyant animation which constituted the principal charm of their character and demeanour. Among the numerous arts they had learned on the Continent—and among them all it was, perhaps, the only one conducive to their personal happiness—was that of utter indifference to *les misères*—or those trifling grievances which form the daily and delightful grumbling-block of so many of our countrywomen. "*Pour porter légèrement la vie,*" says a French proverb, "*il faut savoir glisser sur bien des choses!*" Even frivolity has its axioms of philosophy; and strives to replace, by a degree of *pococurante* levity, the more humble Christian virtue of patience.

"I suspect Lady Grayfield does not like us," observed Eleanor Willingham to Lady Robert Lorton. "But what does her approbation signify? With the Duke's *engouement* in our

favour, and *your* friendship, dear Lady Robert, I am perfectly careless what that animated matter-of-fact feels towards us, or thinks about us."

"You do yourselves justice," replied Lady Robert—the most fascinating little coquette in the world. "At your age you have no right to distract yourself with plans, and projects, and worldly foresight; leave them to Lady Maria as her own especial province; and enjoy the sunshine of life as long as its clouds will let you. Lord Robert and his sister delight in perplexing the brightest moments of existence by all the agonies of second-sight; and are quite indignant when they find my sympathy waiting the actual occurrence of evil. I hate to turn back my head towards the dark shadow that follows me; or direct my telescope towards a coming storm."

"And I," said Eleanor, "have at present seen so little of the miseries of life, that I trouble myself as lightly with apprehension as with my last night's dreams."

"My dear child, one season of English fogs will reform your sin of light-heartedness altogether: I fear you will find, by dreary expe-

rience, that cheerful animation is regarded among us as a very malignant symptom. In other countries, virtue is depicted as a smiling nymph, with frank joyous eyes and gladsome footsteps; in Great Britain, she is typified as a doughty spinster, tricked in antique ruff and bonnet, starched pinners, and a rueful and mortified countenance."

"Her eloquence must be mighty indeed, if, under such a guise, she can continue to increase her train of proselytes."

"Oh! we blindfold our children in their infancy, and stimulate them by the hope of reward—by the sugar-plums of selfishness—to walk uprightly over the burning ordeal. My girls, like their foolish mother, are blest by nature with a very merry temperament; but they are not allowed to laugh after they are five years old. The Duke, and Lord Robert, and Lady Grayfield, assure me that to be amused is a plebeian privilege; and they have provided a governess for my urchins, who is careful to train them up in fitting habits of well-bred solemnity. As to the dear Duke, he has ventured somewhat nearer to the equator, indeed, than the rest of

his frozen family; and has Neapolitanized himself into a taste for guitars and smiling faces—the Carnival and the Willinghams; but it costs Robert and his sister a world of pains to refrigerate him, on his return, into the dulness of phlegmatic indolence becoming the head of the house of Lisborough."

"But why does not Lady Grayfield satisfy herself with drilling her own children, and Lord Robert with training up his—not in the way they should go—but in the way they should stand still?—Why cannot they allow the Duke to amuse himself according to his own fancy, or as *they*, perhaps, may choose to consider it—his folly?"

"In the first place, it is the mania of the Lisborough family to believe that the eyes of the whole earth are fixed upon their proceedings; and that, from the days of Noah until now, their illustrious dynasty has remotely influenced the destinies of every quarter of the globe. Then Robert—who really persuades himself that he is very anxious his brother should marry—frets himself into a fever of consternation whenever he fancies that the wish is threatened with

realization, by any thing approaching to a real flirtation on poor Lisborough's part; and as to Lady Grayfield—although it evidently matters very little to *her* eldest son whether Calmersfield be ever menaced with a Duchess and an heir apparent—she has been so long accustomed to manage her brother, and do the honours of himself and his possessions, that she entertains an instinctive hatred towards all the young ladies with whom he dances, and all the Dowagers with whom he dines. I was apprehensive that her Gorgon brow would have petrified poor Lady Maria last night, when the Duke took the second to your *Notturno*."

"She may calm all her alarms on my account," said Eleanor scornfully. "I do not deny my predilection in favour of the splendours and luxuries of Calmersfield, and his Grace's many treasures of magnificence; but not for all these, and more, would I encounter the life of solemnity which will befal his wife. There is so much of *tête à tête* in English matrimony, that it cannot be measured by emblazoned parchments—by a golden balance, and diamond weights, as we manage such matters on the

Continent; the disposition and qualities of the future husband must be thrown into the scale."

"Oh! Lisborough has excellent qualities; he is good-tempered, and generous, and honourable. I am very fond of him, except on state occasions, when he acts the *grand Seigneur*, and grows a bore."

"Claudia thinks him the wonder of the century. If Lord Robert has any thing to apprehend for his son, it is from *her;* but for me, he is much too formal. And now tell me, dearest Lady Robert, how is it that Lady Grayfield, who you say is so tenacious of her influence, and so jealous of the Duke's regard, chances to be fond of *you*, who are his favourite beyond all rivalship?"

"Oh! all Charlotte's loves and courtesies are calculated by the most approved tables of interest. I was an heiress, you are to know, and as well descended as herself; so she spared neither effort nor blandishment to secure my marriage with her younger brother. She thought me a good match for Robert, and it was quite diverting to see how desperately she fell in love with me. After my marriage, without pretend-

ing to any skill in sorcery, I very soon found her out; and not being of a mysterious temper, made no secret of the discovery. But not angrily—I only laughed at all her little manœuvres, which she did not like; and made Lisborough laugh—which she liked still less."

"And thus you proceeded to open warfare?"

"On the contrary; I remained as pacific as a herald! Charlotte has her weaknesses like the rest of us; but in common with all the Lorton family, she has sterling qualities to form the counterbalance. So when I saw her vexed by my *persiflage*, I left off laughing, both actively and reflectively; for I only keep this sort of irony in *reserve*, as the most efficient weapon of defence practicable against the solemn high mightinesses of the earth."

"Then you still believe that it is fear which makes her so loving?"

"No; I give her credit for a better feeling on the present occasion. She is extremely attached to Robert, as belonging to the Lisborough dynasty; and to my children, as being Lortons by right of inheritance; and seeing that *they* all love me, and that I make them all

happy, she honours me with a sort of collateral affection herself. But I am persuaded Lady Grayfield's original motive for preferring me as a sister-in-law, and tolerating Lisborough's partiality, was her observation of my indifference to the distinction. She saw that I would not be at the trouble of a manœuvre to secure a diadem; and that I left the coveted task of managing the Duke and his civil list entirely at her disposal;—that all the little dirty patronage of trinkets from Rundell's, presentations to livings, seats in parliament or seats in opera-boxes, was a matter of indifference to my indolent nature; and, satisfied that she has nothing to lose by my rivalship, she allows Lisborough to like me as much as he pleases. I am one of the few people, you know, whom it is quite impossible for him to marry. And now let us commence our toilet; for you are to understand that among the deadliest sins of omission and commission, according to his Grace's estimate, is that of being too late for dinner."

The whole of this edifying conversation was duly unfolded by Eleanor to her sister, when

the hair had been curled, and Mademoiselle Céline dismissed that very night. But Claudia was in high spirits; intoxicated with the increasing homage of the Duke of Lisborough, she would listen to no remonstrances. She was neither inclined to suspect Lord Robert, nor to dread Lady Grayfield.

"Depend on it, dear Eleanor," pleaded the sanguine girl, "brothers and sisters have a very moderate influence in such cases. The Duke may consult Lady Grayfield about new furnishing his saloon at Calmersfield, or Lord Robert about the equipage which he tells me Adams is building for him; but it is precisely because he has no wife to whose better taste to refer. If his heart were once really touched, be assured that it would speak too loudly to admit of their further interference."

"If his heart were really touched! But consider for a moment the difficulty of touching a heart that has been concentrated and wrapped up in long years of selfish independence! The Duke has been so accustomed to find his pleasures and inclinations regarded as a first object, and to hear the attentions of unmarried women

pointed out to his mistrust, that those instances of personal regard and preference, which might flatter and attach another man, must have become disgusting to himself."

"Nevertheless," said Claudia, looking complacently round the gilded panels and refulgent mirrors of their dressing-room—"nevertheless, dear Nelly, 'tis a stake worth playing for. I like the Duke better than any one of the Calmersfield guests; he shares in our modes of thinking and feeling, and enjoys all our favourite pursuits. I am persuaded he prefers me to any of the girls here who are so vehemently intent on devouring him; and at all events I shall lose nothing by encouraging his attentions."

"Unless it be your own heart, which you seem to account but lightly throughout the affair."

"My heart!—oh! if I thought the Duke of Lisborough's heart as secure as I *know* my own to be, I should become hopeless indeed! If he is selfish and mistrustful, what are *we*?—If he is forewarned and forearmed against a matrimonial ambuscade, *what* is Claudia Willingham?"—

"*A woman!*—a name including a general confession of sensitive weakness. However, if not forearmed, dearest Claudia, you *are* at least *forewarned;* and once more believe me, that, did any chance of success exist for your views, mamma would have been the very first to project and forward them; believe me, you have no hope of escaping the manœuvres of the Grayfield and her brother."

If any thing could excuse the obstinate infatuation of Claudia Willingham, it was the conduct of the Duke himself. Among all his successive *engouemens*, none had ever appeared to possess him with half the intensity which now actuated his attention towards her. In their riding parties, he suffered no arm but his own to lift her to the saddle; in their evening dances he constantly claimed her hand, and would not hear of a change of partners. He insisted upon lingering by her side in the sculpture gallery, that he might point out his own favourite busts as subjects for her pencil; and he would no longer allow her to walk, drive, sing, or work, except in compliance with his own especial whims and fancies. True it was, that never did

the lovely Claudia appear so beautiful, or so graceful, as when blushing under his gaze, or turning away from his animated whispers; for her whole heart—her whole being—was inspired with an ardour to please, such as she had never felt before.

Even Lady Maria found herself compelled, by the jealous comments of the various mammas assembled at Calmersfield, to turn her attention towards these mutual symptoms. But although gratified beyond measure, and not altogether without hope of a favourable result, she was discreet enough to abstain from personal interference. Apparently altogether occupied with her darling Eleanor, who was sufficiently obliging to be afflicted with a singularly well-timed cold, she contrived to shut herself up with her second daughter, wraps, lozenges, and arra-root, so as to remain in seeming ignorance of the general proceedings of Calmersfield, and the nervous irritation of Lord Robert Lorton.

But poor Lord Robert, in pursuance of his fatal birthright of younger brotherhood, had already undergone more than one matrimonial crisis of this trying description, and was grow-

ing an experienced tactician against the allied forces of his female adversaries. He had long since discovered that it was utterly useless to engage his light-headed, but true-hearted wife, in the affray, and that his sole reliance must rest upon the machinations of his "dear Charlotte." But even with her he had many difficulties to encounter. He found it an arduous task to tame down her feminine susceptibilities into the moderation essential to political movements—into that calm politeness towards the offenders, which might alone enable him to meet their mischievous advances on an equal footing. In vain did he remind her that it was the factious insolence of Madame Henriette towards the mistress of Louis XIV. which had procured her Duchy and distinction at court; in vain did he urge, that Lisborough, notoriously the most obstinate of men, once roused by any ungracious dealing towards his reigning princess to say "*I will*," would be thenceforward lost to them for ever!

"God knows it would be a most gratifying event for us both to see the dear Duke happily married; but then the daughter of such an *in-*

trigante as Lady Maria Willingham would at once mar the future happiness of our family circle. No, no—my dear Charlotte; Lisborough must select a kind, amiable, domestic being, such as his sister, or farewell to all comfort at Calmersfield."

"Whereas the Willinghams would fill the house, and engross all the Duke's attention with a set of riff-raff foreigners, of whom, in my opinion, we have more than enough as it is. Foreigners are very well in a sprinkling, to enliven a party with all their mopping, and mowing, and grimacing; but what have they to give in return for all the trouble we lavish upon them, even should we ever chance to visit their own beggarly castles of desolation?—Heaven grant *us* a sister-in-law, my dear Robert, who has been respectably educated in England, in the midst of respectable English connexions."

"To effect which most desirable consummation, let me implore you, Charlotte, to imitate my courtesy towards these Willinghams. I often prevent Lisborough from dancing with Miss Claudia by the assiduity with which I claim her hand myself—and she dare not refuse me.

Now, it is *your* cue, dearest Lady G—, to affect a violent friendship for them all. Insist upon driving and walking, on all occasions, with Miss Willingham, and there is an end at once of those abominable, those dangerous *tête-à-têtes;* as to all the rest, leave it to my exertions, and I will engage to dislodge the whole tribe from Calmersfield without any permanent mischief."

Lord Robert Lorton's promised manœuvres on this occasion, although extremely efficient, were by no means either new or original; the ancient policy of the borrowed paw and the hot chesnuts, availed with him as well as with the cunning ape of the fable. To a "great house" like Calmersfield, a body-guard of toad-eaters forms an inevitable appanage; and the Duke of Lisborough was fortunate in somewhat more than the usual apportionment of *souffre-douleurs, doubles,* billiard-blocks, living-hunters—younger brothers to talk to the young lady-nieces, cousins, and guests—to fill up the charades and cotillons, and improvisate epigrams for the ponderous albums of the Dowagers;—and middle-aged bores, with heads bald without, and pamphlet-stuffed within, to talk politics on public

days to the country gentlemen; the said politics being importantly authenticated by incidental allusions to "my friend, the Home Secretary," or "my brother, the late President of the Board of Control." Among these, Lord Robert, as heir-presumptive to the lands and tenements around, was tolerably secure of finding ready instruments for his plans.

Polished into discernment by the whetting-stone of selfish jealousy, the wily brother was in possession of a correct tariff of the degrees of influence maintained by this respectable chorus of followers over the mind of the Duke; and he had no hesitation in selecting for the furtherance of his present purpose, Mr. Bentley, a young clerical dependent, whose lay waistcoats were apt to figure somewhat uncanonically in the hunting-field, and the evening quadrille; and a certain plausible, silver-tongued Pylades of a certain age, whose arm was always at the Duke's service to ascend the steps towards White's, and whose white teeth formed a sort of visible echo to his Grace's wit, whenever he chanced to wax jocose. Mr. Russell was a remarkably well-bred man; never hazarded a request, and seldom

spoke above his breath, or smiled beyond a given angle of satisfaction—a degree of moderation which insured him a distinguished place in the solemn friendship of the Duke of Lisborough! "Some people think Russell monotonous," his Grace was wont to say, "and some call him a bore: but *I* like him; he never takes liberties."

On occasion of the Willingham conspiracy, however, the cautious Russell hazarded an attempt such as he had never perilled on any previous temptation. Approaching the Duke in the pauses of a *battue*, and having, as he imagined, wrought him to a favourable mood of audience by a flourishing overture in honour of his Grace's favourite Nock, and its unparalleled feats of the morning, he ventured a slight skirmish against Lady Maria and her daughters. "They were lovely girls, certainly; but *maniérée*—decidedly *maniérée*. They had too much of the jargon of a particular *clique;* and that, perhaps, not of the highest order. For after all, the Neapolitan set was by no means of the most exclusive class."

"I am thoroughly tired of exclusives," replied

the Duke, as he stalked away over the stubble. "There is nothing so wearisome as lending an eternal ear to the mere echoes of an echo. Give me a *new* oracle, even if its inspiration be of doubtful authenticity."

Half of this peevish reply being "by the Gods dispersed in empty air," Mr. Russell did not immediately discover that he was voting with the minority.

"Did you ever happen to see the caricature," he persisted, "which Lancaster circulated at Paris, of Lady Maria Willingham in the character of *La vedova* something or other, out of one of Goldoni's comedies? with her daughters represented as——"

"I have *not* seen it yet. But Claudia was mentioning it to me last night, and promised to get it for me to complete my set of Lancaster's sketches—his domestic treacheries as *I* call them. I detest his system altogether, and I have determined that nothing shall induce me to re-admit him within my doors."

A tremendous dilation of the nostrils—an unfailing demonstration of Lisborough ire—now convinced Mr. Russell that he had missed his

mark. Nay, so enormous a proportion of toads were administered by the Duke to his digestion, during the remainder of the day, that even *his* patient appetite turned restive. On the following morning, Mr. Russell's well-packed phaeton and well-furred valet drew up beneath the portico of Calmersfield; and he, to whom the remote prospect of contingent ejection from its hospitalities, in case of a Willingham Duchess, had been a sufficient motive for a first attempt at *tracasserie*, found himself compelled to an immediate cession of his bachelor-tenure. Lord Robert, meanwhile, who saw through the whole affair, beheld his departure without one struggle of remorse. He cared not whether the paw of his cat were reduced to cinders; saving as a horrible thermometer-evidence of the fury of the Lisborough furnace!

The clerical dandy was the next victim destined by the merciless Lord Robert to encounter the perils of the Willingham pitfall; and poor Bentley having been duly primed for mischief by Lady Grayfield's unceasing representations during two rainy mornings, of the poverty of Lady Maria's innumerable connexions, as well

as of the large proportion thereof destined to wrestle with the ills of life in surplices and black coats, he rushed fearlessly to the ordeal. During the sleepless nights, or night-mared repose, following those days of atmospheric moisture, his mind's eye had rested upon the identical parochial church of the county of D. which he had long pre-appropriated as his own; while his mind's ear became deafened into horror, by the reading-in of a Willingham or a De Vesci. He became desperate; and like other desperate men, urged on the failure of his own fortunes.

Much has been said respecting the treasons hatched in female society during the solitary hour abandoned to their debates between dinner and coffee; but more, far more, might be added touching the reprisals practised by mankind, their natural enemy, in that fatal half-hour which succeeds the arrival of the groom of the chambers and his wax-lights. Scarcely has the last "good night" sounded in the last anti-room—scarcely has the fair Viscountess, in her dressing-room, abandoned her perfumed locks to the delicate fingers of her French maid, and

the worthy Viscount in the saloon beneath ensconced himself in a Skelmersdale chair, with a copy of the last Edinburgh Review in his hands—when every woman of the party, who chances to possess neither father, brother, husband, nor acknowledged lover, among the group of loungers retaining possession of the saloon, falls successively under the lash, and is finally sacrificed to the merciless scandal of their ill nature.

"How very well the Miss Willinghams waltz," observed Mr. Ducie, a good-natured and gentlemanlike young Oxonian. "A cousin of theirs, a Christ-church man and old Etonian, who is a great friend of mine, told me they were considered the best dancers in Paris; and they at least excel any thing one sees at Almack's."

"Yes! quite *figurantes*, as you observe," said Bentley, delighted with the cue. "Eleanor, failing a better vocation, would make an admirable Columbine, and Claudia——"

The Duke, who was drinking a glass of iced water, stopped short and investigated the hapless speaker from head to foot. "Well, Bentley, pray proceed. You are so admirable a judge

of *les usages du grand monde*—so versed in *le manuel des bienséances*—so exquisite a critic of female accomplishments—pray proceed. What of Miss Willingham and her waltzing?"

Bentley, who was out of sight of the dilated nostril, and not sufficiently acquainted with the vocal intonations of Lisborough fury to discover that the Duke was boiling with indignation, simply enough complied with the request.

"Why, as to Claudia Willingham and her waltzing, my lord, I must fairly avow that I should be very sorry to see a wife or sister of my own put forth the same attractions in a similar manner. '*Il y a des plaisirs si doux qu'ils nous sont défendus,*' said La Bruyère. Now I will just show you the lovely Claudia's notion of pleasure, and notion of decency." And seizing Sir William Vavasor, a remarkably shy young man, round the waist, he commenced an extravagant mimicry of Miss Willingham's style of dancing, perverted into a tone of voluptuous freedom, which the struggles of his reluctant and involuntary partner rendered still more ridiculous.

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Duke, his eyes

flashing fire as he spoke, while he strove to attract the attention of the whole party to the scene. "My friend here is really *impayable!* Not satisfied with assuring you, gentlemen, that he would not accept Lady Maria Willingham's daughter as a Mrs. Bentley, in any shape—(poor girl! I trust no malicious person will petrify her by the intelligence!)—not satisfied with reprobating a lady, one of my most esteemed Calmersfield guests, as vulgar and indiscreet, he literally presumes to adventure the chastisement of Archbishop, Bishop, and the diocese at large, by exhibiting in his own person all the indecent contortions of some degraded opera dancer. My good Bentley, I trust you may render your contrition available to the Dean and Chapter, at ——; but you will find it difficult to excuse yourself to *me* for insulting my female friends in my presence."

The Duke took a candle from the chiffonier and stalked out of the room; a movement of dignity which was followed by the ominous silence of the rest of the party. Those who had been reading, looked up from their books contemptuously at the disconcerted Bentley—

compassionately at the despairing Lord Robert. The young men shrugged their shoulders as they adjourned to the billiard-room; and the elder ones hastened up stairs, that they might gossip with their wives over the promised change in the politics of Calmersfield. Mr. Ducie alone had courage to observe aloud, "The Duke of Lisborough in love!—so much the better. A pretty and agreeable Duchess will be a great addition to the neighbourhood."

Meanwhile, having counselled the unhappy Bentley to pack up his portmanteau, and avoid the angry aspect of the morrow's breakfast-table, Lord Robert Lorton sought refuge from his woes in the sympathy of Lady Grayfield's dressing-room.

"It is all over, Charlotte! the thing is quite irremediable. Lisborough is evidently engaged to that artificial, hollow, odious girl. Poor little Robert!"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Oh! he has committed himself by so vehement a defence of his idol, that I have every reason to believe them engaged. I give up the case as hopeless."

"Retreat insures defeat. No, no! take nothing for granted—do not despair—fight on to the last gasp. Trust to me to second your efforts; and if we do not foil the Willinghams at last, why—'I will burn my crutch.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

J'ai fait en peu de tems d'assez belles conquêtes,
Je pourrois me vanter de fortunes honnêtes ;
Et nous sommes courus de plus d'une beauté,
Qui pourroient de tout autre enfler la vanité.

Voltaire.

It is astonishing with what velocity, according to the amiable modification of modern society, incidents and opinions are made to travel to the knowledge of persons, for whose ears, of all others, they were the least intended. Before noon on the following day, Lady Maria Willingham was perfectly acquainted with every domestic fact preceding the departure of Messrs. Russell and Bentley. But on this occasion the treachery of the clandestine informant was less flagrant than is commonly the case.

Lady Robert Lorton enjoyed too keenly the discomfiture of an interested manœuvre of any kind, to care whose character was compromised by its detection, or to wish to preserve the intelligence for her solitary amusement; and no sooner had her dispirited lord mounted his hack to ride to covert, than she sent for Eleanor to share her chocolate in her dressing-room; where, without exaggeration or reserve, she proceeded to detail the whole story. "But remember," added she, in conclusion, "remember my warning, and do not let Claudia order her *trousseau* on the strength of the Duke's passing enthusiasm—for *passing*, believe me, it really is. I have seen him in love and out of love six dozen times; his heart is worn so threadbare with the mean adulation of young ladies and their mammas, that he has learned to mistrust himself and them. He gives himself up to momentary intoxication, only to re-assume a still more frigid sobriety; and were your sister, for whom last night he put lance in rest and was eager to engage in a crusade, to appear to-day at dinner in an ugly gown, or with her hair in ringlets, farewell to all Lisbo-

rough's sentiment. It would not cost him a tear were she to be impaled to-morrow at sun-rise."

The fact and the comment were simultaneously communicated by Eleanor to her mother. But Lady Maria was either too much elated by the Duke's eager defence of her daughter, or was too habitually on her guard against deception, to look upon Lady Robert's qualifying notes on the tale, as any thing more than an artful feint. Cunning people are apt to see so much more than the truth, that they regard the actual visage as a mask, and expose themselves accordingly.

Nor did the events of the evening tend to diminish her fallacious self-congratulation. Lord Robert Lorton returned from the hunting-field with a visage lengthened like that of a prime minister who has divided on a minority; he was, in fact, at the lowest ebb of despair, touching the matrimonial tendencies of his brother.

The covert of an English *rendezvous de chasse* has been christened, not unaptly, "the Coffee-room;" there is scarcely a hunting county in which the forthcoming deaths and marriages,

politics and scandal, are elsewhere manufactured. Now Lord Robert, who had unfortunately lingered in his Calmersfield dressing-room for the purpose of unfolding his budget of grievances to his lady, had arrived so late at the appointed spot, that the Russell and Bentley history had preceded his hack; and before he had time to reach his groom and sleek hunter, twenty different county voices had congratulated him upon the approaching nuptials of the Duke of Lisborough. Vainly did he attempt to escape—to turn a deaf ear to their insinuations—to interest himself with the huntsman and kennel politics: his friends readily perceived that he was agonized even unto martyrdom, and would not spare him a single sentence of their rapture!

Poor Lady Maria pondered all these things in her heart till she was well nigh demented! All dinner-time she fancied that the Duke would whisper his proposals in the course of a cotillon or a game of *écarté;* but she was disappointed. She then flattered herself that his Grace would demand a private audience when she retired for the night; and again she was

disappointed! *N'importe*!—he had very significantly expressed his intention of breakfasting with them previous to their departure on the following morning; and as this was many hours before the *levée en masse* of the Calmersfield guests, there could be little doubt that he would seize on that auspicious moment for his declaration. But alas! just as the coffee and dry toast were smoking in his hand, in rushed Lady Robert in her *déshabille* of the night! declaring she would see the last of her dearest Eleanor, and placing herself with the greatest *naïveté* between Claudia and the Duke of Lisborough. Lady Maria could willingly have boiled her to death in the hissing coffee-pot!

The post-horses were punctual, and the Willinghams were compelled to avow themselves ready; yet not one word verging upon a proposal had escaped the lips of his Grace. The travelling-carriage rolled with barbarous rapidity along the Macadamized roads of Calmersfield Park, and poor Claudia's bosom began to heave with suppressed sobs. At present, however, Lady Maria saw no cause for despair. Lady Robert's *mal-à-propos* arrival was accused as the

origin of all the evil, and as a premeditated piece of mischief; and they might still look forward to the arrival of the post—that second providence which, like its prototype,

Sends letters to some wretch's aid!

On the strength of this forlorn hope, poor Claudia, who had travelled down bodkin, was ensconced in a comfortable corner of the carriage as a Duchess-expectant; and when they paused for the night, Lady Maria—the tactician—not only called her "her dearest child," but for the first time in her life was singularly curious touching the airing of her bed.

It must be owned that on their arrival at home, the lodging-house in Seymour-street wore a miserably lugubrious appearance, after the gilded saloons of Calmersfield; and that the "tough and scorched mutton" became at least as distasteful to their palates as after their first estrangement from the *cotelettes* and *salmis* of Paris. There is a vulgarity of sound and scent inseparable from a small house and small establishment, which her (future) Grace found at the present moment extremely repulsive to her

nerves; and she began to listen with yet more feverish eagerness for the bi-sonorous matin knock, which excites so interesting a sensation in London among all persons correspondentially inclined. At length, after an interval of six or seven endless days, a frank from Calmersfield—"*Free*—Lisborough," was placed upon the breakfast-table; and, as it was addressed to Miss Willingham, Claudia, without a pause and with a beating heart, tore open the envelope! A voluminous inclosure fell to the ground! Lady Maria grew pale and Eleanor red, with the intensity of their emotion; nor dared they hazard a single comment until Claudia, bursting into tears and tossing the epistle into her sister's lap, exclaimed, "Take it, Nelly!—'Tis only a bundle of embroidery patterns from that odious Lady Robert Lorton."

Lady Maria, unpossessed of a single spark of generosity of mind, instead of sympathizing with her daughter's disappointment, began to vent the expression of her own in a thousand bitter sarcasms; taxing the two girls with the failure of her favourite scheme, and straightway charging them with having formed it them-

selves, and on the most absurd premises. In a day or two, however, the Duke himself arrived in town, and all her expectations were revived by the sight of a card for the first ball at Lisborough House. From that moment nothing could be too good for Claudia; and growing suddenly discontented with all their Parisian finery, Lady Maria ventured on an order for three splendid new dresses to Triaud; an order which, by the bye, before the day was over, she contrived by various hints and suggestions to fasten as a present upon her poor old uncle, General De Vesci!

Meanwhile Mr. Russell had taken up his snug abode in his Albany Chambers for the season; and whereas, among the numerous dowager-houses and dinner-houses, where he was in a manner an habitual guest, and apparently as inevitable to the turbot as its lobster-sauce and cucumber—that of the Duke of Lisborough formed a highly important and agreeable addition, he felt himself deeply aggrieved by the premature abridgment of his holiday visit to Calmersfield, and cruelly menaced by the matrimonial projects of its noble proprietor.

Especially attached to the bachelor *état major* of his Grace, he had found it extremely convenient, on many occasions, to accept a corner of his carriage to Paris, and a *pied à terre* in his apartments in the Place Vendome; and at Baden and Spa he had more than once achieved the genuine honours of European vogue, by forming part of the Lisborough party. He was well aware that the distinguished favour with which he was received at the mansions of half the Lord A.s and B.s and C.s of the Peerage, on five days of the week, borrowed its cordiality from the certainty that he had formed part of the thrice hallowed circle of Lisborough House on the other two;—that his scandal was looked upon as an authentic echo, and his political intelligence as a dawning truth, because emanating from that fountain head of fashionable glory. And to resign all this!—to find himself degraded into a mere independent, respectable Mr. Russell, with two thousand a year and a wig, was more than he could think upon with common patience. He was certain that Claudia did not like him;—that, being older than the Duke, she would re-

gard him as likely to maintain his Grace in all his fidgety old-bachelor ways, and to vote for the exile of the loves and graces from their little circle. Already he imagined himself compelled to cede his place at table as an *habitué* of the house, to some young Hussar Viscount, flaunting with raven mustachoes; already he saw himself dislodged from his long-tenanted suite at Calmersfield, in favour of some incipient Baronet-witling from White's:—and as to Paris or Pisa, the future Continental excursions of the Lisboroughs would of course be shared by the coronetted or landed interest—by young heirs affording the promise of a good match to the Duchess's younger sisters.

Unhappy Mr. Russell! after cogitating himself into a near approach towards a fit of the jaundice, he resolved, with most heroic energy, that the field should not be lost for lack of defence; so stepping into his phaeton, he contrived, in the course of thirteen morning visits, systematically selected among the most gossiping widows and maidens of his acquaintance, to spread a report of the Duke of Lisborough's ensuing marriage with Claudia Willingham.

He was a sufficiently experienced tactician to be aware that a premature alarum of this description, sounded in the ear of the public, is an almost peremptory bar against the consummation of the event.

On this occasion, indeed, the London public had nothing to say in reply. With all its schoolboy partiality for negation—all its terrier-like tendency to a snarl—it could find neither argument nor motive against the alliance. Lady Maria Willingham was forgotten in London society; her daughters were at present unknown; and as she had been careful to inscribe their arrival ["In Seymour-street from CALMERSFIELD PARK,"] among the locomotive and most mendacious records of the Morning Post, the world could form no reasonable conjecture against the probability of the case.

By the result of this little manœuvre, however, poor Lady Maria became thoroughly mystified in her turn. She found herself suddenly elevated to the highest honours of fashionable popularity; smothered by the sudden caresses of every human thing boasting the most distant consanguinity to the houses of De Vesci or Lori-

mer, and overwhelmed by successive showers of visiting and invitation cards from all the Duchesses, Marchionesses, Countesses, Viscountesses, and Baronesses, to whom she had ever been allied through the social link of a formal bow or curtsey. She was amazed to find how much every body loved her, and how deep was the anxiety of all her former acquaintance to become introduced to her charming daughters.

"My dear Eleanor," she exclaimed, "how fortunate that I resolved to settle in London. We have not a single day disengaged for three weeks to come; and I see no chance of our being obliged to dine at home during the whole of the season. As to horses, Lady Dynevour insists upon my using her's, as if they were my own, and my uncle assures me, that at his club he is pestered to death by applications for an introduction here. By the way, my dear girls, in all this success, you must not neglect your aunt, De Vesci; although she is never more than half awake, and might be easily persuaded that you have been sitting with her an hour every day since you came to town, yet your uncle is very acute about such matters, and very

tenacious that every attention should be paid to Mrs. De Vesci."

"Yes! he hinted to me yesterday that we were grown very fine at Calmersfield; and that we had not dined in Portman-square since our return," said Claudia.

"Who *can* dine there?" exclaimed Eleanor; nothing but a salamander could be nourished without excruciation, upon that eternal series of mulligatawney, currie, cabobs, cayenne, and preserved ginger. My uncle's bill of fare positively requires one's throat to be Macadamized."

"Oh, that might easily be remedied by anticipating with a *bouillon*."

"Yes, dear Mamma," said Claudia. "But the society—the odious set of men one meets there! What could neutralize the horrors of the De Vesci circle?"

"My dear, your uncle cannot get rid of his government-house ways. He cannot yet divest himself of the idea that he is the representative of majesty. He shakes hands with all his guests by way of being affable, and addresses all his morning visitors with, 'I trust you will take

your dinner here to-day.'—*Take your dinner!* How thoroughly colonial!"

"And unfortunately these morning visitors of his are exclusively wretched denizens of the army and navy-list—atrocious monsters belonging to the Commissariat—or official *animalculi;* so that he has no chance of finding them pre-engaged. At seven o'clock the whole congregation of beasts throngs back to the De Vesci ark."

"Very true, my dear. But although the guests in Portman-square are persons whom it is your duty to cut if you meet them the next morning, remember, Eleanor, that your uncle has ten thousand a-year still unsettled, and has no relations nearer than ourselves. So go and put on your hat, and inquire after Mrs. De Vesci."

For this time, however, they were redeemed from the impending calamity, by the arrival of Mary Willingham "on hospitable thoughts intent." Sir Joseph, having caught a remote whisper of Claudia's approaching advancement, had become suddenly impressed with the urgent necessity of inviting his sister-in-law and nieces

to a family dinner; and as Sophia and himself were enduring the agonies of the annual influenza, inevitable in London to April and east winds, he had dispatched his daughter with all the excuses and compliments he could muster between the pauses of his ipecacuanha lozenges. Mary, however, proved an admirable ambassadress; for, instead of these formal civilities, she graced her errand with so earnest an expression of pleasure at seeing her cousins, and so inimitable a blush of cordiality, that no one could doubt her regret on finding them already bespoken. Lady Maria, indeed, howbeit she excused herself with courtesy, was secretly indignant that she had been supposed to be at the command of an *impromptu* invitation. She felt that her day of "family dinners" was over; and that the tide of fashion now flowing in her favour, would land her high and dry among vessels of far greater magnitude than a paltry provincial, ex-clerical, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham.

"I am sorry to find Mr. Willingham has returned to Oxford" observed Lady Maria to her niece. "It is so many years since I have

seen him, that I am becoming very anxious to renew our acquaintance."

"Charles went with us to visit Minnie previous to his departure, and regretted to learn from her that the length of your stay at Calmersfield would deprive him of the pleasure of being presented to you for some time."

"By the way, Mary," observed Eleanor, "your brother's bosom friend was of the party, and one of its most agreeable members."

"Mr. Lorimer is very lively—has very great and varied talents," replied Mary Willingham, blushing still deeper than before.

"Lorimer!—Mr. Lorimer!—you must surely be speaking of one of our own cousins, while *I* was alluding to a Mr. Ducie."

"Mr. Ducie is only a schoolfellow of Charles's; Frederick Lorimer is his dearest and most intimate friend. I conceived that you must be aware of the fact, as I have always understood him to be nearly related to Lady Maria: he is Lord Lorimer's second son."

"Oh! we never plead guilty to a relationship to younger sons," replied Eleanor, laughing. "It does not answer to extend one's connexions

below the heir apparent; otherwise we might incur the stigma of being seen with a Mr. John or a Mr. William for a partner, an infamy scarcely inferior to that of the '*Travaux Forcés*' of the branding iron."

Mary saw that her cousin intended to be witty, and rewarded the effort with an obliging smile; but she was utterly in the dark as to Eleanor's meaning. Lady Maria, who had been diligently inditing a flummering note of apology to Lady Willingham, now came forward with her inquiries.

"I think I heard you mention a son of my cousin Lord Lorimer's, Mary; what is he like, and what are his pretensions?—Is he a rising young man?"

"I scarcely know how to answer you," replied her niece, timidly. "Mr. Lorimer is remarkably handsome, and distinguished himself very much at Eton; but Lord Lorimer, who has an elder son in Parliament, and a younger one who is intended for the church, has decided that he cannot afford to give Frederick an university education, and Mr. Lorimer is sentenced to finish *his* at some college on the Continent."

"So much the better!—he will escape being stupified with the classics and mathematics, and all such unavailable learned lumber: and will acquire what Jouy calls '*les talens utils*'—music, dancing, languages, and fencing. I predict that this boy will become the most civilized of his family—who are *vieille-cour* people, and stupid enough. Eleanor! remind me when I call on Lady Lorimer to inquire about this son Frederick of her's."

"At present," observed Mary, "Mr. Lorimer appears to have very little genius for '*les talens utils*;' he is almost as grave as my brother, who is almost as dull as myself," she continued, smiling, as she addressed her adieus to her cousins. "But I hope you will visit us more frequently, and assist in polishing and enlivening us both."

"Really that girl is not so frightful, after all," observed Claudia, who was arranging her own hair in a little mirror insinuated into the lid of her work-box.

"Not frightful, my dear!—she is marked with the small-pox."

"So slightly that it is scarcely perceptible."

"And then," said Eleanor, "her teeth are so exquisitely beautiful, that her smile quite illuminates her countenance. I wonder if her brother is like her."

"He *was* the most miserable, meagre, yellow boy in nature," exclaimed Lady Maria, peevishly. "I have never seen him since I lost my poor dear Claude!" (by no possible chance did she ever revert thus lamentingly to the death of her husband,) "and I hate the very thoughts of him. I always regard Charles Willingham as the usurper of my son's rights."

"You must marry him to Minnie," said Eleanor, "some six or seven years hence, and so restore Heddeston to the right line."

"Oh, my dear child," exclaimed the tenderest of mothers, "for the love of pity, do not remind me that I have a third daughter to renew my martyrdom of chaperonage; at all events, let me dispose of you both before I am obliged to form any plans on Minnie's account. When my little Claudia here becomes Duchess of Lisborough, she will assist in getting *you*, Eleanor,

off my hands; and I shall depend upon you *both* to bring out Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham's *protégée* with fitting *éclat*."

"Here is Lady Monteagle come to drive us to Colville's, to order our bouquets for Monday night. Who intends to accompany the tiresome old woman?—Claudia?"

"Oh, no! my dear Eleanor, by no means: I cannot think of allowing Claudia to leave the house while this east wind continues; it is fatal to a fair complexion like hers—besides the Duke might call. And on second thoughts, Eleanor, I will go with you myself; for I must manage to coax the Dowager out of her carriage for Lisborough House. The hammercloth has not been put on mine yet; and one would not appear there you know in a horrible hired carriage."

"Oh, you might have left that piece of diplomacy in *my* hands. I can persuade old Monteagle to any thing by listening to her opodeldoc stories, and her Jeremiades over young Stapylford's wildness."

"Well, good bye, my dear Claudia! Here is a book to amuse you while we are away—those French memoirs which the Comtesse

Manfroni lent me at Calmersfield. But put them under the cushion of the sofa if any one comes in; for I have found them *un peu—un peu—un peu!* And pray, my dear, do not sit too near the fire while you are reading; the glare of sea-coal is as bad for a delicate skin as the east wind. Monday night approaches, Claudia!—and in neglecting your personal attraction, you forfeit all chance to the Duke of Lisborough."

CHAPTER IX.

Combien d'esprit, de bonté de cœur, d'attachement, de services, et de complaisance dans les amis, pour faire en plusieurs années bien moins que ne fait quelquefois en un moment, un beau visage, ou une belle main!

La Bruyère.

I TRUST I have contrived to insinuate into the mind of the experienced reader—and what modern novelist is cursed with any other?—some suspicion of an existing attachment on the part of the gentle Mary Willingham towards Frederick Lorimer. The attachments of young ladies in general should never be more than *hinted* until sanctioned by banns or a special license; and Mary's was at present peculiarly entitled to this degree of delicate consideration; being unsolicited — uncertain of return — bestowed on a younger brother, the son of an avaricious and

pompous sire—and presenting a tremendous promise of disappointment to the secret projects of her own parents.

The mere existence, indeed, of an unsolicited affection in the bosom of a female of delicacy, is a fact that would be carefully concealed by any other biographer; but for my own part, I feel no scruple in initiating the world into Mary's secret, being morally and demonstratively persuaded, that, from the palace to the cottage, there exists not throughout England a girl of purer feelings, or of more exquisite womanly modesty. Mr. Lorimer had been from childhood her beloved brother's beloved friend; had spent his holidays on more than one occasion at Heddeston Court; had grown up insensibly from the blue-jacketed schoolboy into the tall stripling of fashion; and no wakening consciousness, no recoil of feeling, had yet prompted her to withdraw from him the confidential appellation of Frederick; or to resent that of Mary from his own lips. She loved him;—but at present she knew it not herself.

Lord Lorimer was a formal, well-intentioned, mouthy, frothy man, of the old school. He

had married late in life; and accordingly found himself called upon to direct and govern the wild animation of three fine young men, and two giddy young women, at a period of existence when elderly gentlemen are generally fonder of their night-gown and slippers than of the more active paths of society. Had not his Lordship entertained a singular degree of predilection for petty authority and minor legislation, he might have divested himself with ease of these uneasy cares of the parental estate; for Lady Lorimer was not only some thirty years his junior, but was equally distinguished by the solidity of her understanding and the excellence of her heart; she was a bright example of womanly virtue throughout the various duties and obligations of her sex. But she was neither addicted to moral harangues, nor prone to dwell with emphasis upon the minutiæ of social dialogue; and Lord Lorimer necessarily regarded her as deficient in acuteness and energy. He persuaded himself that had it not been for his own anxious interposition, his children would have been neither reared nor educated; and that, but for his exertions, his whole household would have

fallen into a most lamentable state of disorganization.

Mr. Lorimer, the heir apparent, unfortunately inheriting his mental and moral qualifications rather from his father than his mother, was somewhat empty and very solemn. He was vain of his birth, his person, and his acquirements; and fully intended to render them all available in the acquirement of still higher honours. Frederick Lorimer, on the contrary, was one of the most unassuming, cordial, frank-hearted beings in the world. Beyond the wish of being happy and rendering others so, he had not a single earthly desire; he was liable to strong and sudden impressions, but fortunately for his happiness, they were prompted by the same amiable and disinterested spirit which was the origin of his actions. He had all his mother's goodness of heart; but it was at present unregulated by the sterling common sense that formed the basis of Lady Lorimer's character. The daughters were good-humoured, lively girls; fond of finery and fashion—miserable at the loss of a ball, and enchanted by the adulation of every new partner. Their mother

loved them with true maternal tenderness; and strove to moderate their girlish follies with so much judicious kindness, that she never terrified them into reserve or hypocrisy. Lady Lorimer was their most confidential friend; and being the first person admitted on all occasions behind the scenes of their wild plans and vehement attachments, she was enabled to do far more by persuasion than their father by all his pompous authority.

To a woman of this amiable disposition, Mary Willingham's gentle character offered, of course, a far greater attraction than to her daughters; who were rapt into an ecstacy of admiration by the brilliant accomplishments of the more fashionable cousins, and never failed to vent their sarcasms upon the unattractive and ungraceful address of poor Mary. Vainly did Lady Lorimer attempt to equalize their prejudices and qualify their enthusiasm. She too, perhaps, was somewhat partial in her judgment; for with motherly penetration she had already discovered the timid girl's predilection in favour of her own Frederick. A mother is always indulgent towards the attachments created by her off-

spring; and more particularly towards a disinterested passion for her second son. Now, among the persons who were the most vehement in their sympathy with the reported engagement between Claudia Willingham and the Duke of Lisborough, the Lorimer family in general particularly distinguished themselves. His Lordship, who was the cousin of Lady Maria, and a prodigious stickler for the maintenance of a family connexion, was highly gratified by the prospect of such a splendid collateral addition to his family tree. Mr. Lorimer, whose mind was bewildered by borough-interest and laudable Parliamentary ambition, already projected nothing less than a junction with the Lisborough party; and the girls out-ecstasied their usual animation, in their triumphant anticipation of bridal balls and unnumbered partners at Lisborough House. Even Lady Lorimer rejoiced. She knew it was the first wish of Lady Maria's worldly heart to form an advantageous establishment for her daughters; and she was always satisfied that other people should be made happy in their own way. Frederick alone remained indifferent on the occasion; he

had never yet seen his friend Charles's beautiful cousins; and a *mariage de convenance* was an occurrence claiming no sympathy from his honest bosom. He was destined, however, to alter his opinion on the subject.

It chanced that by some strange miscalculation or oversight on the part of the Miss Lorimers, Lady Lorimer's cards for an assembly had pointed out the express evening selected for the first ball at Lisborough House. His Grace, pre-assured of the most fashionable crowd in London, or to speak more correctly, finding the whole of London society open to his fastidious selection, was always late in his invitations; so that there remained no time for the circulation of a postponement on Lady Lorimer's part. His Lordship, her husband, indeed, was indignant at the bare suggestion of such an humiliation. "He flattered himself," he said, "that Lady Lorimer was secure of forming her own distinguished circle, let however many Dukes appoint their entertainments for the same evening." He even insinuated a hope that his Grace of Lisborough might not find cause to lament *his own* temerity. His daughters began to find their

secret consolation in anticipating the accession of brilliancy which the simultaneous ball would confer upon the toilets of their female guests; and Frederick needed no consolation. He had privately determined to slip away "*unknownst*" in the thickest and dullest of his mother's uneventful party, and to be the first to join in the first waltz of the rival festival.

The important night arrived. The candles and sinumbras blazed, the liveries glittered, and the street resounded with oaths and flagellation. A crash of panels, and an unintermitting plunge of irritated steeds, deafened the neighbourhood. In the midst of this noisy overture, Lady Maria and her daughters ascended Lord Lorimer's illuminated staircase, unprepared for the sensation excited by the annunciatory reiteration of their name throughout the moving mass of white satin and diamonds in the crowded suite above. They had very little suspicion of the vehemence with which a thousand disappointed rivals thronged towards the reception-door, to catch the earliest glimpse of the favoured beauty who was about to monopolize the most coveted of British coronets. Lady Maria, indeed, became

agreeably conscious of an universal buzz of admiration following their entrance; but this she very naturally attributed to the loveliness of the two *débutantes*, on whose adornment neither labour nor expense had been spared. She discovered with delight that the result was eminently successful; Claudia and Eleanor Willingham were, beyond comparison, the most beautiful girls in the room.

Scarcely had they struggled through the outskirts of the crowd, when ten, twenty, thirty different persons were pleading to Lady Lorimer for an introduction; and among those to whom a Continental acquaintance, or an intimacy of "auld lang syne," afforded any plea for familiarity, Lady Maria was quite amazed to find what a very strong anxiety existed to learn how she bore the change of climate—how she liked her new house—how she ate, drank, slept, moved, thought, and felt. Not Shakspeare's Crook-back, after his successful suit to the Lady Anne, could be more smitten with astonishment at the discovery of his own unsuspected attractions. Dinner parties!—she might have dined for five hundred days to

come at the expense of the Peerage in general. Horses and carriages!—she might have travelled on borrowed wheels to the Cataracts of Upper Egypt, without the expenditure of a single feed of corn. She heard honourable mention made of a long-forgotten bilious fever which had nearly exterminated her in her teens; and it was astonishing what a number of intimate friends now reminded her of their former visits to the obsolete dampery at Chiswick;—"visits she had probably never heard of, as it appeared a mere matter of ceremony to leave a card."

Lady Maria was wise enough to take things as she found them, without instituting an inquiry into motives and contingencies. It was premature to affect the dignity of offended majesty; and it would be quite time enough to profit by the lavish offers of her profuse congregation of friends, in case of the failure of her mighty matrimonial expectations. She was all courtesy, all bland and smiling gratitude; "to beguile the time," she looked like the time; and was already as affably dignified as though she were mother to all the Duchesses of the whole coronation-pageant.

There was one person, at least, in that brilliant assemblage, who was as disinterested in her admiration of Claudia's loveliness, as she was painfully affected by that bestowed from another quarter upon Eleanor's animated graces; and this was the modest daughter of Sir Joseph Willingham.

"I am dying to get near you, Mary!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, addressing her over the capacious shoulder of a stationary Dowager. "I want you to tell me the name of the beautiful creature who kissed her hand to you just now—there!—she is smiling at you still."

"The young lady with the white flowers in her hair?"

"Young lady? vile, frigid distinction! No, no!—the goddess—nymph—fairy queen—what you will—any thing but young lady!"

"It is my cousin, Eleanor Willingham."

"Lucky dog that I am, for she is mine also! I will fly to claim my relationship. Or stay, Mary; you who stand in an intermediate degree of consanguinity to both, *you* shall be my mistress of the ceremonies."

"Willingly, if you will lend me your arm to get through the crowd. Mamma is in the midst of a rubber, and I must ask her permission before I leave her side."

But before she could obtain the sanction of the deliberate Lady Willingham, Frederick was gone again. His impatience had carried him towards one of his own sisters, whose services he knew he could command; and Mary, wedged in between the rubber and the Dowager, had to endure the gradual torture of observing his animated advance towards Lady Maria's party; his presentation and flattering reception; his flushed cheek in addressing Eleanor, and her smiling elegance in listening to his irrepressible adulation. By and bye, while still immovably clutched in the gripe of the crowd, she saw him present his arm to lead the blushing beauty into the refreshment-room; and as they vanished from her view, the chamber in which she stood became an undistinguishable chaos of glimmering lights and rocking walls; and the conversation around her was generalized into a hollow murmur, like the voice of a chafing sea. During her progressive recovery

from this first shock of incipient jealousy, a country neighbour, a Kentish Baronet, who had long loved her for the patience with which she endured his profuse gift of tediousness, pressed his services on her acceptance for a similar journey; an offer which Mary, in the restless hope of witnessing the conclusion of the affair, readily accepted. Their progress through the crowded rooms, however, was slow. The provincial Baronet was no adept in the polite art of inserting his elbows into the shrinking sides of the stationary matrons; and poor Miss Willingham was much too gentle and too courteous to rush forward through the opposing tides with the insolent defiance of a girl of many seasons.

As she passed through the door at which stood Lady Lorimer, a patient sentinel keeping watch and ward over the interests of her arriving and retreating guests, her pale face attracted the attention of the kind hostess.

"My dear Mary! you are indisposed—exhausted by the heat! Can I get you any thing? or shall I let Lady Willingham know that you are unwell?"

"Thank you, dear Madam, I have just quitted Mamma. Sir William Wyndham is so good as to take me in search of a glass of cold water; and when I have left this crowded room, I shall be well in a moment."

"Go then, my love! I will not detain you," whispered Lady Lorimer, kindly accompanying her to the head of the stairs, and remaining there a moment to watch her progress. She *had* however detained her; and just as Mary reached the hall, she experienced the peculiar satisfaction of seeing Frederick Lorimer, hat and cane in hand, escort the well cloaked figure of Eleanor through a file of footmen towards the street—Lady Maria and Claudia having already preceded them to the carriage. Apparently there already existed an excellent understanding between the parties; for having deposited Eleanor, he jumped in afterwards! The footman, in slamming both steps and door, shouted "Lisborough House!" and away they drove in a moment. "After all, Frederick is their cousin!" thought Mary. But the recollection, and the scene, and the relationship altogether, renewed her dizziness,

and her urgent inclination for a glass of cold water!

It was the first time poor Mary had ever grieved over her own and her parents' deficiency of *ton*—it was the first time she had ever envied an admission into the enchanted halls of the Duke of Lisborough—it was the first time she had ever become painfully conscious of her own personal inferiority to her favoured cousins! They were sprung from the same parent-stock: in fortunes her destiny rose far above their own; her education and acquirements equalled theirs; her heart and mind raised her immeasurably above their level. Her attire on the present occasion had been richly selected; nor could any reasonable or tangible superiority be alleged in their favour. Yet Mary felt at once that *she* had no business with the ball at Lisborough House; that she had no air of fashion; no currency in the *beau monde* to sanction her admittance; no style to adorn the Galoppe or the Mazurka; no *tournure*, no brilliancy of beauty to fascinate the attention of the mercurial Frederick Lorimer.—It was a hopeless case!—and Mary was obliged to have recourse to a

second glass of water, before she could nerve her courage to re-encounter the affectionate inquiries of his unsuspecting mother, or to plant herself once more beside the critical interest of the concluding rubber.

But if Mary's emotions were painfully excited by the events of the evening, what was the tremour of Lady Maria's frame, on joining the long line of carriages which heralded their approach to the purlieus of the ducal mansion! There is nothing more perplexing both to body and mind than the rocking and jerking motion which accompanies a fashionable progress of this description, and mocks the impatience of the feverish denizens of the crowded carriages. Eleanor, who sympathized feelingly in the agitation of her sister, silently pressed the trembling Claudia's hand; but their mother was too much elated by recent homage, and by the confirmation she had received at Lady Lorimer's of the general belief in his Grace's attachment to her daughter, to dream of any thing but an approaching triumph, and Claudia's glorious distinction as queen of the ball. She was persuaded that before they left Lisborough Hall that night, the

proposal would be made, and the strawberry-leaves already budding over the brow of the future Duchess.

The gateway was happily navigated, and the circle of the court-yard achieved, amid the unnoticed compliments and witticisms of Mr. Lorimer. The marble hall, the vestibule, the laurel-wreathed staircase, the perfumed anti-chamber were quickly passed; and already at the door of a gallery leading to the blazing ball-room, they caught a glimpse of their noble host. Claudia, who was leaning on her sister's arm, trembled as she pressed it to her side: she was almost breathless; for being intimately versed in his Grace's habits and demeanour, she discerned in a moment that he had assumed his grandest aspect of dignity to do the honours of his house.

The mechanical groom of the chambers now whisperingly announced the names of "Lady Maria and the Miss Willinghams—Mr. Frederick Lorimer;" but his Grace did not advance the breadth of one flower of the Tournay carpet. He gently extended the tip of his hand, gracefully inclined his head, and suffered his lips to

express a courteous but listless smile of general welcome. A fresh whisper was breathed in his ear—new guests were arriving, and the Willinghams passed on without further notice.

Eleanor, perceiving that her sister was dreadfully pale, contrived to lead her behind the crowd of the ball-room, and place her on a seat; while Lady Maria, on Mr. Lorimer's arm, proceeded into the midst of the fray, to conceal her mortification in affected volubility; to fan herself, exclaiming against the heat of the room; and to look anxiously around her for some of her Neapolitan or Calmersfield acquaintance.

But it would not do! Mr. Russell stood bowing and displaying to her, from an awful distance, the double range of his pearly teeth; the reinstated Mr. Bentley, who was flirting to desperation with a highly rouged foreigner, remarkable from her very bare shoulders, gave her the recognition of a familiar nod as she passed; and half a dozen Ladyships interrupted their gossipry to lisp, "My dear Lady Maria, how long have you been in town?—what an insufferable crowd!" but no anxiety—no homage—no eager inquiries—no allusion to

her charming daughters:—they evidently cared for her as little as if Claudia were already married to a stock-broker, and settled in Bedford-square.

Frederick Lorimer meanwhile, who was utterly unsuspicious of her Ladyship's schemes, and their frustration, and who was tolerably unversed in the conventional value of a Duke in Dowager estimation, calculating his Grace of Lisborough's importance rather according to his *battues* and stud of hunters, than to his family diamonds and hereditary precedence, became extremely anxious to get rid of his loquacious companion, in order that he might obtain Eleanor's hand for the first quadrille, preparations for which were now audible from the orchestra. After sundry manœuvres, he managed to settle Lady Maria into an arm chair, and an unavoidable prose with the De Vesci wife of an Irish Archbishop; and instantly flew in search of her daughters.

Claudia and Eleanor were now seated in view of the whole room, on either side of Lady Robert Lorton, who was striving to entertain them with her most graceful and affectionate

attentions. Although unsuspicious of the full extent of Lady Maria Willingham's presumptuous expectations, she felt convinced that her young friends must have been mortified by the manner of their reception. She had a personal partiality for both, and was, moreover, of too generous a spirit to bear with patience that *any one's* feelings should be sacrificed to a family manœuvre. But while Frederick was forming his engagements with Eleanor, who declined dancing so early in the evening, Lady Grayfield herself came up to the little group with the utmost cordiality; and relaxing from her usual habits of dignity, insisted that Claudia should take her arm, and parade the whole suite of state apartments, to which they were now introduced for the first time. Her sister remained with Lady Robert and her new admirer; and as she noticed the affectionate patronage with which Lady Grayfield ushered Claudia through the throng, introducing her to this person and that, and pointing out to her attention the principal objects of *virtù* adorning the saloon, she became satisfied that her Ladyship had dismissed all jealous apprehensions

from her mind. She saw, in a moment, that Claudia's chance of Duchesship was over.

In a very few minutes the whole mystery was explained. The burst of Michau's well-accorded band resounded from the gallery, and in a moment the Duke of Lisborough was seen leading the waltz with a very fair, young, timid, simple-looking girl—decidedly English in her air and attire—totally devoid of pretension, and with symptoms of the nursery still clinging to her personal appearance. She danced ill, and appeared embarrassed by the publicity of her situation; yet, when they paused, the Duke "hung over her enamoured"—whispered in her ear—and treated her with all those tender distinctions which he had recently bestowed upon Claudia Willingham. The thing was evident enough. She was his last *engouement!*

"Who is that very interesting girl?" inquired Eleanor, assuming an air of candour, and somewhat ungraciously interrupting Lady Robert in her details of a fall from her horse, which she had either *had*, or expected to have, or been apprehensive of having, in the park that morning.

"Which interesting girl?—I am looking upon a legion of angels in blonde and white satin."

"With whom the Duke of Lisborough is dancing?"

"Let me see—let me see; who has he selected for his partner?" said Lady Robert, lifting her glass to her listless eye, and advancing her graceful head through an interstice of the crowd; "Oh, that is Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, a niece of the late Lord Grayfield's. Extremes meet, you know, my dear Eleanor: by which rule Lisborough—having been in love last week with your sister, and her tact, and elegance, and accomplishments—is just now desperately captivated by yonder little ladyship's girlish *niaiserie*, which *he* chooses to call *naïveté*. He talks about her uncontaminated mind and beautiful simplicity, and the charm of being a first object of attachment to such a spotless heart!"

"And what says our friend, Lady Grayfield, to all this?" inquired Eleanor, after having ascertained, by a furtive glance, that her new adorer had been tempted from her side by the excitement of the music, and the scene, and the circling waltz.

"Why, I rather suspect that Charlotte cunningly let slip this new quarry in his path, purposely to give a novel impulsion to his feelings."

"She would, then, approve his union with Lady Anastasia?"

"She would approve his union with no one: she chooses herself to play Queen Margaret to his Francis the First. No, no! Lady Anastasia is notoriously engaged to her young cousin, Lord Vallerhurst, or she would not be permitted to whisper unmolested in Lisborough's ear, as she is doing at this very moment."

"*Engaged!*" thought Eleanor; "then, after all, there may yet remain some hope for poor Claudia."

"Last night," resumed Lady Robert Lorton, "at a little impromptu ball at the Ducie's, Charlotte was congratulating me that the Duke had formed so safe an attachment; which would preserve him, she said, from other perils. I am pretty sure she alluded to your sister; but I affected not to understand her; and, by way of affronting her and the Burgoynes, who are nearly akin to her late husband, I assured her

there was a report at the clubs that Lord Burgoyne had sent over a commission to Torlonia, the banker at Rome—where Lord Vallerhurst is completing his education—to hire bravos, and waylay him in the Campagna."

"And stiletto him in due process?"

"In order that the old betrothment might not interfere with his silly little daughter's present views of becoming Duchess of Lisborough."

"At which insinuation Lady Grayfield laughed, of course?"

"By no means; she looked extremely serious for half an hour; and at length only comforted herself with the reflexion that she should be able to manage her own step-niece, Anastasia, far better than a Claudia Willingham. Poor Charlotte! she is pursued by the furies like Orestes—perpetually haunted by the phantom of dear Lisborough's marriage! And now tell me who was that tall, dark-eyed admirer of your's, to whom you were so barbarous just now?"

"A second son of Lord Lorimer's. And even with *your* romantic enthusiasm, dearest Lady Robert, I trust you will sanction any de-

gree of barbarity I may put in force against a paltry younger brother."

"Certainly, love! certainly! unless he chance to have a sister as vigilant as Charlotte Grayfield, who will take care that the head of the family never anchors, or wrecks himself upon the sunken rock of matrimony."

Mr. Russell, perceiving that the Willingham dynasty was not yet wholly degraded, and that Eleanor appeared to be very high in the graces of the exclusive yet popular Lady Robert Lorton, now approached to tender his tardy compliments of inquiry; to utter his sentimental reminiscences touching the musical *soirées* of Calmersfield, and his anticipations of archery meetings there for the ensuing summer. Even the Duke of Lisborough proved himself to be sensible of the influence of general admiration, by following the outstretched finger of the crowd. Claudia Willingham's loveliness, even with the drawback of an unusual air of languor and vexation, had excited the strongest interest, as she passed through the rooms on Lady Grayfield's arm; and no sooner had he found all the young lordlings of the day crowding around him to solicit

the honour of a presentation to the new beauty, and discovered, by fatal experience, that Lady Anastasia waltzed detestably, and conversed with more ingenuousness than ingenuity, than he condescended to claim the honour of Miss Willingham's hand.

He addressed her, however, neither as a bridegroom nor a lover, but "talked of opera, park, and play" after the most approved fashion of partnership commonplace; and by this conduct, poor Claudia was more hurt and more mortified than if he had withdrawn his notice altogether. She might, in that case, have believed him to be offended;—as it was, she could only recognize him as indifferent, or insultingly capricious.

CHAPTER X.

Her love—like violets breathing 'neath a thorn—
Seems but the sweeter for companionship
With aught so dark—so harsh—so cruel! Love
Which, like Eastern gums by pilgrims offered
Upon a holy shrine, yields its soft odours
With an expiring breath.

Marlow.

Mary Willingham, who had already entered her twentieth year, had nevertheless remained guiltless up to that fatal sixth of May, of all the ordinary manœuvres of young ladies of her age; and unmolested by the sweet sensibilities which render the pillow sleepless, and the common business of life importunate. On returning from Lady Lorimer's party, however, she had some-

what prematurely dismissed her maid—whose care in disposing the satin folds within the wardrobe and the necklace in the trinket-box, had never before appeared so superfluous—in order that she might moisten her *papillotes* with a few tears; while the officious attendant, who had already ascertained from the footman the care with which Sir William Wyndham had handed her young lady to the carriage, and who, with waiting-maid sagacity, had immediately discovered her discomposure, retreated to her own aërial dormitory, under the satisfactory conviction that Miss Willingham had returned home with a proposal still echoing in her ears.

Meanwhile, poor Mary wept, even while she blushed at her own tears. She accused herself of a very indecorous weakness in this irrepressible emotion; she reviled herself as mean, envious, and contemptible; and after forming a praiseworthy resolution, to think no more of Frederick Lorimer, and to cherish no unkind feeling against her cousin Eleanor, she retired

to rest, and dreamt of him till morning; when she awoke in the hysteric agony of tearing the white wreath from her rival's snowy brows!

Unfortunately, she had to encounter a stormy breakfast-table. Lady Willingham was fretting under the reminiscent afflictions of two lost rubbers of the night before; and Sir Joseph, who had been perusing two descriptive columns in the Morning Post, illustrating the Duke of Lisborough's ball, and enumerating his partners, could scarcely smother his vexation that "the fascinating and lovely Miss Willingham," who had such honourable mention in the recital, was not a daughter of his own. He could not forgive Lady Maria, with her paltry twelve hundred a-year—and, moreover, as his own pensioner to a still meaner amount—for having achieved a distinction unpurchaseable by his annual thousands!

Mary perceived their peevishness in a moment; but it only urged her to a double effort in conquering her own secret despondency. She

possessed that exquisite art—but, no! it was not an *art*—nothing in Mary was an art—that exquisite impulse of nature, which teaches the suggestion of every image and every association most capable of affording pleasure to an auditor. She pointed out to her mother's notice the beautiful flowers—the firstlings of summer, which had been forwarded that morning from the Heddeston conservatory; she asked her father's permission to share his afternoon ride, and proposed a visit to Minnie, as an object for their expedition; and she spoke with such gentle submissiveness, and endured with such silent forbearance their fractious negatives, that Sir Joseph and his lady rose from their third cup of tea, with brows less ruffled, and with hearts less biliously sensitive to the minor woes of life. A thorn still rankled, indeed, in poor Mary's bosom; but she was little accustomed to indulge in pondering over her own personal grievances.

"Here is that tiresome old Lady Monteagle,"

exclaimed Lady Willingham, as she left the breakfast-table. "If Dowagers *will* take early airings, at least they might refrain from premature morning-visits. Mary, my dear, come with me into the drawing-room: I cannot deny myself, for I am sure she caught a glimpse of my cap."

"I dare say Lady Monteagle saw my cousin's name among the guests at Lisborough House; and fancying it to be mine, is come to inquire if Stapylford were there."

"Stapylford! You are dreaming;—Mr. Stapylford is at Oxford."

"Nominally, dear Mamma. But Charles writes me word he retains his rooms at Mivart's, and runs up to town for all the best *fêtes* and fashionable races. His mother is now confined at home by Lord Stapylford's illness; and I am persuaded she often commissions Lady Monteagle to cross-examine me concerning her son, whose proceedings she imagines we must learn from my brother."

"And bad as those proceedings are, she has nobody but herself to thank for his irregularities. Stapylford has a good disposition, and had he been brought up as Charles has been, might have turned out an honour to his family."

On reaching the drawing-room, they found that the Dowager was not unaccompanied. Lady Maria was with her, and began expressing to Mary her extreme regret that her daughters had found themselves too much fatigued by their ball, to leave home so early; her own principal motive, indeed, for such an untimely visit had been to inquire after her niece, whom she announced to have been looking very pale and ill the night before.

Lady Willingham, rather startled by this intelligence, fixed her eyes upon her daughter's face; which was now dyed of so deep a crimson that she abandoned her momentary intention of sending for Sir Henry Halford. Lady Maria's ostensible motive of politeness being thus fairly disposed of, she proceeded, under its screen, to the real busi-

ness of her singular pre-animation; to discover, namely—whether Lady Willingham purposed attending the drawing-room; a measure which, when she found it had been previously determined, she very strongly recommended. The fact however was, that she had long intended to present her daughters, and had fully intended to borrow Sir Joseph's equipage for the occasion. She was secure of the loan of Lady Monteagle's or Mrs. De Vesci's; but she had persuaded herself that the *family* carriage, bearing the Willingham liveries and arms, would appear more exclusively her own.

But she had still another latent intention; and as soon as the Dowager had engaged Lady Willingham's attention with one of her running-pattern monologues upon the costume, equipages, entertainments, habits, and customs of the last century—upon Ranelagh, Garrick, Delpini, Sir Joshua, and the riots of eighty—Lady Maria affected to be fascinated by the beauty and variety of Mary's collection of heaths;

and drawing her to the marble table on which they stood, began to require all sorts of botanical explanations.

"And this lovely plant, you say, is the *Erica Latifolia*?—and this the *Gracilis*? My girls were quite vexed, Mary, that they could not procure half an hour's gossip with you; but they are nursing themselves for to-night—Lady Robert Lorton chaperones them both to the opera. Pray let me attempt to decypher the tiny label upon this beautiful plant—'the *Erica Si-n-en-sis.*' Young Lorimer, I find, is an intimate friend and schoolfellow of your brother's? (And you tell me these heaths should only be watered twice or thrice a week?) Pray is he Lord Lorimer's second or third son?—and what sort of a young man is the eldest?"

"Frederick is a second son; and Mr. Lorimer is expected to become a very distinguished man, as I believe I mentioned to you before; he took a brilliant degree, and came into Parliament this very session. Independently of his

rank and fortune, he will probably make a great figure in public life."

"I am glad to hear it; for they are near connexions of my own, and a family which I highly respect. Lady Lorimer appears to be a mere good sort of woman; and her husband one of those stately machines of courtly wood, made to do honour to a star and garter. My dear Mary, your conservatory at Heddeston must be considerably increased to display these lovely exotics. But, in fact, it requires the eye of the master, or rather, the eye of the mistress, to produce any thing creditable in the way of flowers; and in my time, we never had a gardener of sufficient science to engage *my* attention in the business. Frederick Lorimer has, of course, no *expectations* beyond his father's interests, and a younger brother's portion?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"There is very often a maternal grandfather, or a bachelor uncle, or an old maiden godmother, who takes pity on those wretched mar-

tyrs of the creation; but in that case a double surname generally forewarns one. I thought it augured ill when I heard this young man presented as only Mr. *Frederick* Lorimer. Had *I* been blest, or oppressed, with such a supernumerary appendage as a second son, I certainly would have had him christened Mr. Howard Willingham, or Mr. De Vesci Willingham, by way of helping him through his undeserved misfortunes. It is inflicting an unnecessary degree of infamy upon a poor young man to call him Mr. John, or Mr. Thomas."

Her Ladyship again adverted to the stand of heaths, as she made her way back to the scene of dialogue between the Dowager and the dummy; and Mary was so utterly unprepared to suspect the existence of artifice, or to imagine the necessity of manœuvring where no field of action courted conquest, that she actually fancied her aunt had been smitten with a genuine admiration of her plants; and immediately proceeded to dismember them

of their choicest flowers in order to form a *bouquet* for her cousins' appearance at the Opera.

"What an absurd thing," exclaimed Lady Maria to Lady Monteagle, as they drove back to Seymour-street, settling the fragrant nosegay in the pocket of the carriage as she spoke; "what a very unnecessary exertion on the part of Lady Willingham to go to the drawing-room! With an ugly and unfashionized daughter, obscure connexions, and bad health, I think she might spare herself the attempt; which, after all, will gain her nothing. She has not the least chance of being included in any royal invitation; nor has she any family relationship to keep up, or to maintain her own dignity."

"The Willinghams are a very ancient Kentish family," replied Lady Monteagle, who, being herself a Baronet's daughter, rebelled against the suggestion; "and belong to a class which has always been found a main support

to the Sovereign and the Constitution. Charles—my grandson Stapylford's friend—will probably, one day, represent the county."

"Possibly! but they are not going to present *him* at the drawing-room. And as to poor Mary, she is quite a Bodham in countenance and gesture. I should recommend her to marry some clergyman with a good living, within distance of Heddeston; for she will never make a creditable match. She is totally unfit for London society."

"Our neighbour, Sir William Wyndham, has proposed for her twice; and *he* has twenty thousand a-year, and the reversion of a peerage."

"Indeed! and she had the imprudence to refuse such an offer! I remember Wyndham Park; I have a very great respect for the family; the present Baronet was a charming boy, but I have quite lost sight of him. You must make us acquainted, my dear Lady Monteagle; old neighbours you know should never cease to be friends. The first time we

dine in Hereford-street, pray oblige me by persuading Lady Dynevour to invite Sir William Wyndham."

"He has dined with us twice this year, and we never exceed a given number of invitations to the Whig interest. It might look odd in the county, you know; and make people talk. And now, my dear Lady Maria—pray tell me—you were at Lisborough House last night, and of course saw Stapylford?"

"I do not know Mr. Stapylford, by sight."

"My dear Ma'am, he is the constant companion of your nephew."

"I should not know my nephew, were I to meet him in any place of public amusement. Your Ladyship forgets how long I have been abroad, and how much young men alter."

"Well, had you chanced to see Montague Stapylford, I think you could not have failed to ask his name. He is certainly the finest young man in town, and the most fascinating; and if he is not ruined, or shot in a duel

before he comes of age, I venture to predict that he will turn half the heads in London. It is a grievous thing—a very grievous thing, my dear Lady Maria!—that young man, you know, is heir to an ancient peerage and a clear thirty thousand a year; but he is already in the hands of the Jews; and if his father should die, there can be little doubt that he would be ruined in a month; ay, and break his poor mother's heart into the bargain."

"My dear Lady Monteagle! You see things too much on the dark side! Pray how old is Mr. Stapylford?"

"Just eighteen; but he has been as good or rather as *bad* as his own master, these two years past—has already exposed himself in a thousand ways;—indeed I must say, that had it not been for Charles Willingham, he would have been already expelled both Eton and Oxford."

"Very much to my nephew's credit."

"Oh! if Charles were not *rather* too much of a saint, and dreadfully ugly, he would be a

charming young man. Stapylford has lived so much with me, that they have been brought up together more like neighbours' children than any thing else; but the fact of the matter and the true secret is, that young Willingham has nothing to *gain* by my grandson—wants nothing from Stapylford, you know, my dear Lady Maria: whereas the young men with whom he chiefly associates are considerably older than himself, and look upon him as a sort of natural prey. They negociate for him with the Jews, because they are aware they shall profit by the produce of the loan;—they arrange the purchase of his horses, because they know they shall ride them;—and urge him to give dinners at the Clarendon, with an eye to the reduction of their own coffee-house bills. Now there is young Tichborne, the Duke of Arlington's nephew, who, to my knowledge, has only an allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; upon which he keeps five hunters, and indulges in a thousand expensive vices. He is just so much

older than Stapylford, and so much favoured in society, as to form his model; and, by way of gratitude, I suppose, Montague defrays the cost of *his* follies as well as his own."

"Well—well! my dear Lady Monteagle," replied Lady Maria with an air of vague abstraction, for she could interest herself in none but her personal distresses; "all that sort of thing will work its own cure. His father, you know, was very wild till he married Miss Margaret."

"*Till* he married? Ah! my dear Madam, few people know what my daughter Margaret has had to go through! She has been a victim to Lord Stapylford's dissipation."

Lady Maria, who had known her for fifteen years as the most fashionable flirt and determined ball-giver in London, tried to look credulous and sympathising.

"A husband on the turf, and half a dozen executions in the house, form a considerable bar to domestic happiness!"

"Half a dozen executions! why, then, Mr. Stapylford—between his own extravagance and his father's—will come into a very limited inheritance!" exclaimed Lady Maria, in whose mind a remote plan had already begun to form itself on the young Oxonian's account.

"Pardon me, my dear Madam! Montague is in the entail of his uncle Lord Waterville's property;—to say nothing of any little pittance I may have it in my own power to bequeath him," replied the Dowager, swelling with importance. "But here we are in Seymour-street, I protest. I was going to ask you, as this is Saturday and an idle evening, if your Ladyship and the young ladies would favour me by taking a cup of tea in Hereford-street?"

Lady Maria, who had as much taste for the operation called "taking a cup of tea" as for taking a cup of hellebore, was delighted to feel herself handsomely provided with an excuse. "A thousand thanks, dearest Lady Monteagle! you are always so kind and considerate;—

and nothing would have given the girls so much pleasure as to pass a snug comfortable evening with you. But most unfortunately they have engaged themselves to accompany Lady Robert Lorton to the Opera."

"Humph!" ejaculated the Dowager, with a lowering brow. "Lady Robert Lorton!—now you know, my dear Lady Maria, you and I are old neighbours and friends; and I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying a word or two to you in the way of confidential advice. Beware of that Lady Robert Lorton! She is a very—*very*—unsafe companion for your daughters."

"You really alarm me!—any thing affecting her character?"

"Character? Why not exactly; but she is one of the most giddy, inconsiderate, frivolous little creatures in the world! The habits of her house are extravagant beyond all belief, and will render your girls extremely discontented with home. And then, although she

does not commit herself by any gross breach of decorum, she has acquired the character, in gentlemen's society, of being so vastly agreeable and fascinating, that we know she must have purchased her popularity by certain sacrifices to a certain extent!"

Lady Maria knew no such thing; but she *did* know that Lady Robert was the successful rival of Lady Stapylford in the *beau monde*, and that she had declined Lady Dynevour's visits as being a bore of unequalled magnitude;—and formed her conclusions accordingly.

"How thoughtful—how obliging of you to put me on my guard! Depend on it, my dear Lady Monteagle, I will keep my eye upon all this! My poor unsuspecting girls have taken a prodigious fancy for her; and it would be imprudent to irritate either her or them by a premature rupture; by degrees, however, I shall wean them from her society. Farewell! I shall look in and inquire after your Ladyship's rheumatism to-morrow, in returning from church."

Lady Maria Willingham tripped gaily from the carriage, and flew to her daughters' dressing-room; where, after recounting the ill success of her mission, and the impertinence projected by Lady Willingham of appearing at the drawing-room in her own carriage, she passed full half an hour in demonstrating to them the value of Lady Robert Lorton's acquaintance. "Putting the Duke quite out of the question, my dear Claudia—and although Lady Grayfield's plan is a mere feint, I am convinced we shall make nothing of him—but putting the Duke of Lisborough wholly out of the question, I am convinced Lady Robert's friendship will form a most important resource to you. You see, my dears, she has no daughters to interfere with your interests; she is a little giddy woman, whose agreeable society attracts a circle of the best men; and she is wise enough to know that two very pretty lively girls will materially enhance the charm of her *coterie*, without prejudicing her own influence. The sort of men

who flirt with married women have nothing to say to young ladies; and regular, heir-apparent, ten-thousand-a-year, domestic men—such as of course you would wish to ally yourselves with—may be found in Lady Robert's circle, although they would never entangle themselves in any silly affair of mere gallantry."

"Lady Robert has written since you have been out, Mamma, to beg that Claudia and I will dine with her to-day without ceremony; and, as she has offered to call for us, we have accepted the invitation."

"Quite right—quite right! I will take the opportunity to pay off a bore-debt by dining with the General. Quite right! under all the circumstances it will be extremely creditable to us to be seen on an intimate footing with the Duke's sister-in-law; besides she would scarcely invite you, unless some advantageous men were of the party; and there is no occasion on which a girl may make herself appear to so much advantage in the eyes of a marrying man, as a

dinner. In the style of your conversation, my dear girls, always keep in mind the tone which might be supposed to suit a liberal country household—the tone which might give a man an idea of your being calculated to do justice to the honours of his house, without neglecting his own domestic comfort."

"Yes, Mamma!" said Claudia mildly. "And always to ask *his* opinion instead of giving our own."

"Oh! we are tolerably versed in our lesson," exclaimed Eleanor, half sarcastically. "We always talk of the happiness of our little fireside circle, and the difficulty of tearing ourselves away from home. *Home!*" she reiterated in a bitter tone, gazing round the shabby limits of their little chamber. "But while we are discussing these tactics, we forget that it is time to dress; and if we neglect that important ceremony, all these fine sentiments will turn to very poor account!"

And so saying, she proceeded to entwine

Mary Willingham's heaths into her glossy black hair; with due deference to Frederick Lorimer's decision in favour of the form of Grecian heads.

CHAPTER XI.

Vous, infidèle, avec votre air sucré,
Vous m'avez fait ce tour prematuré ;
De votre cœur l'inconstance est précoce.

Voltaire.

Lady Robert Lorton's coterie was of a description more rare in London than in Paris; and perhaps more rare in modern Paris than in that of the *ancien régime.* Possessed of a character of elegance and refinement essentially different from the stately splendours of Lisborough House, it was distinguished by a certain tone of freedom and independence wholly untainted by dissoluteness;—by a slight tinge of literary taste utterly distinct from pedantry;—and by a degree of exclusiveness and selection

so superior to the common-place affectation of *finery*, that it created no offence even among the excluded. It was formed, in short, by some half a dozen women of fashion, chiefly married ones—and somewhat more than twice that number of the opposite sex. These were selected neither from their rank, fortune, beauty, nor wisdom, but from a happy and moderate combination of all such qualifications;—or, to define the talismanic requisite for admission in one comprehensive word, they were valued in proportion to their power of being *agreeable*.

Persons of the most eminent virtue are oftentimes extremely tiresome; persons both wise and learned are frequently ill-tempered and peevish in their disposition; and persons distinguished by the length of their parchments—whether of pedigree or rent-roll—are occasionally remarkable from their vulgarity of mind and address. An *agreeable* personage is one incapable of these faults;—one who, if wanting

in the primary qualities recorded, is possessed of good gifts which atone for the deficiency. Lady Robert herself was noble, rich, lovely, witty, amiable, and eminently agreeable; and each among her numerous friends, if less *universally* qualified, was endowed with the latter gift, and at least *one* among the former. Even Lord Robert appeared to moderate his faults on entering the magic circle of his home; he was aware that his selfishness would meet with no sympathy or encouragement, and he wisely exerted his better powers to suppress or at least to conceal the defect.

In society of this description, Claudia and Eleanor Willingham found ready acceptance; their beauty, and elegance, and accomplishments were duly appreciated; and as they were cunning enough to keep their pretensions out of sight, they provoked neither envy nor opposition. There was not one of this chosen set who would not have rejoiced at Claudia's union with the Duke of Lisborough;—first, to mortify

Lady Grayfield, who was regarded as mean and intractable and narrow-minded; and next, to attach his Grace more particularly to their own circle, with all his mighty capabilities of increasing its stock of pleasures and enjoyments. They were well aware of his dulness and solemnity; but then his unique mansion in town—his beautiful country-seat and delicious villa—conferred even upon *him* the power of being agreeable. His high-breeding and goodnature were also qualities of no mean account in the calculation.

Lady Robert's dinner-party was confined to two or three men;—not *advantageous* men, as specified by Lady Maria's maternal solicitudes—but middle-aged personages, with a certain income to maintain a position in society, and leave the vulgar cares of life out of sight;—who, from their currency in the fashionable world, had always a fund of novelties to contribute to the joint stock of general discourse, without affecting the odious colloquial displays of what

is called a conversation-man;—whose good breeding was powerful to disguise, where it could not repress, ill-temper;—who were always ready, in short, to amuse and to be amused. Her opera-box was visited, but not crowded, by several of the younger male members of her own coterie; men of rank and fashion and elegance, who came without undue eagerness, and departed without ceremony;—*not* to flirt—not to affect elaborate efforts of wit and gaiety—but to recount their own observations of the day, and to interest themselves in those of Lady Robert Lorton. It was evident, from their ease of mind and manners, that the society to which they belonged was well organized—matched in mouth after the fashion of the hounds in Theseus,

Like bells each under each.

The loss of a single member of this little knot of associates must manifestly have become the origin of discord.

"We shall sup with Lady Barringhurst," whispered Lady Robert to her young friends, as they were waiting the arrival of the carriage, shortly after the commencement of the ballet.

"We have not the pleasure of knowing her," replied Eleanor, with some degree of hesitation.

"She saw you last night at the Duke's, and begged me to bring you. I mentioned the scheme to Lady Maria, who gave her august consent; and thus I shall have the pleasure of presenting you at once to all my friends."

Arrived at the scene of action in New Norfolk-street, the Willinghams began to congratulate themselves on the invitation. An elegant, but unostentatious supper-table was prepared with about five-and-twenty covers, and the room was soon filled with the *élite* of the *élite* of London. Lady Barringhurst herself was a woman of about thirty; extremely lovely, but singularly calm and undemonstrative in her countenance and address.

"I call her my consolation," said Lady Robert

to Eleanor Willingham. "She has one of those happy dispositions which cannot be persuaded that any thing wrong or gloomy exists in the world. She sees every thing on its bright side! Without being insensible or undiscriminating, she is endowed with so gentle a temperament, as to be incapable of suspicion or despondency. Whenever I am cross or unhappy, I contrive to seek Lucy Barringhurst's society; and without boring me with persuasions, or arguments, or harangues, she makes me feel that I am to blame, and puts the whole instrument in tune in half an hour. After this preamble, you will readily believe that her husband and children are the happiest people in the world. Lord Barringhurst is chained to the galley of politics; and being blest with a somewhat clumsy intellect, he is always getting into some public scrape or other, and making himself the badger of the House. Any other man would have been worried into his coffin ten years ago; but Lucy smooths down his

ruffled feathers with so gentle and so unostentious a hand, that he scarcely recognizes his misfortunes."

"A charming character!" observed Eleanor, gazing upon Lady Barringhurst's swan-like grace and dazzling fairness, as she glided from friend to friend, breathing to each, with involuntary discrimination, some surprisingly acceptable phrase or comment. "She appears a most lovely and loveable creature." But Eleanor's admiration was secretly lavished rather on the charms of her Ladyship's diamond necklace than upon those of her disposition!

"The bright brunette who has just now entered the room," continued Lady Robert, "forms a strange contrast with Lucy's tranquil sweetness. Lady Barringhurst soothes me when I am unhappy;—Mrs. Grandison diverts me when I am dull. She is a living sunbeam—sparkling, and evanescent—a very meteor of brilliant irregularity;—neither her words nor her actions are amenable to calculation; and

her indifference to public opinion constantly incurs the stigma of levity. She has the kindest heart in the world; yet her sarcastic wit in fastening upon general follies, has often been resented as conveying personal satire. I am rather afraid of her myself; but I confess that no one amuses me half so well. Ah! here is Sir George Wolryche—that newest and best edition of the Scandalous Chronicle. He traduces us all to our very faces, and makes us laugh at caricatures of our individual selves."

"Claudia, I perceive, has met with some of her Calmersfield friends. Is the Duke himself a member of your set?"

"Occasionally;—he would bore us if he came often, and *we* should bore *him;* for poor Lisborough is accustomed to a degree of exclusive homage, such as we are very little accustomed to pay to any one. I suspect he is coming to-night; for the set of young men who now surround your sister are the mere pages to our own true knights and esquires; a tribe of

younger brothers, who are too poor to be fine-gentlemen-proper, and are therefore fine-gentlemen-reflective. They ape and toady Lisborough, and dine and drive with him accordingly. Henry Mulgrave has a delicious voice, and sings romances;—Sir Comyne Wallace dances like Mercury;—and Lord Cosmo Somerset is the wittiest and readiest of epigrammatists. But stay! I see a new man among them—Mr. Lorimer—your admirer of last night, I protest! I wish you joy, my dear Eleanor; for although I fear he is a mere objectionable, yet it always gives a girl a certain vogue in her first season to have a presentable man of good family dying for love of her."

"Mr. Lorimer, however, appears exceedingly disposed to live; he is at present as animated as your friend, Mrs. Grandison."

"I beg, my dear, that you will reduce him to Iceland moss without further delay. It is a most impertinent thing in a younger brother to look like a thriving suitor. He is coming this way, and

I shall go and make my own recognitions at the other end of the room, in order to leave ample space for the massacre."

Claudia, meanwhile, who was receiving the incense of all the juvenile members of the society, and looking as surpassingly lovely as a beauty, courted and flattered, generally looks, was astonished to perceive that the entrance of the Duke of Lisborough produced little or no sensation in the room; that at Lady Barringhurst's he was only *one of the party!* This singular indifference proceeded from the absence of all manœuvring mammas. From the little coterie, besides herself and her sister, there was but one unmarried woman present; and that one—Lady Barbara Desmond—was herself so superior—so exquisitely the fashion—so pretty, and animated, and distinguished—that she had nothing to gain from his Grace's attentions. She had every possible pretension and qualification to be selected as his Duchess; and moreover, it was pretty evident that such a

selection would have been requited with contempt by the most elegant and *enjouée* little elf that ever wandered from fairyland! As to Lady Desmond, she was too fond, both of her daughter's society and of her own amusement, to occupy herself with any matrimonial scheming.

Mrs. Grandison, who was eminent for that species of lively *naïveté*, which the old and ugly generally translate into coquetry, soon peremptorily monopolized his Grace's attention, and placed him next to herself at supper; but by a fortunate coincidence, Claudia Willingham and Sir Comyne Wallace were stationed exactly opposite; and although the Duke knew that *he* was too poor to be a marrying man, he also knew that he was accounted the greatest connoisseur in female beauty among those whose oracles are omniscient in the memorable bay-window in St. James's-street; and that the young Baronet was almost as powerful as himself in conferring the immortalities of fashion upon the object of his adoration. Sir Comyne

smiled, and the Duke became inattentive to Mrs. Grandison's arts;—Sir Comyne sighed, and his Grace found himself obliged to swallow a glass of iced maraschino;—Sir Comyne whispered, and Claudia blushed in her turn—and the fastidious Lisborough was visited by a symptom of jealousy, of rare occurrence to his unsusceptible frame;—that burning thrill through the head, which is instantly followed by a chilly and aguish shiver throughout the whole person. The poor Duke was as perplexed as Othello himself!

Unversed in similar casualties—wholly unaccustomed to find the object of *his* choice engrossed by another, Lisborough played but an awkward part in the pageant;—he had recourse to the obsolete and common-place manœuvre of retaliation. But the stars were in combination against him; and on turning towards his other female neighbour, Lady Barbara Desmond, with the intention of a desperate flirtation, such as might prove more alarming

to Claudia's pride than his little skirmishes of unmeaning gallantry with Mrs. Grandison, he found the garrison already invested. Her Ladyship was not only engrossed by the unobtrusive adulation of the most entertaining of younger brothers, Henry Mulgrave, but received his Grace's solemn advances, and ponderous compliments, with an air of the most supercilious indifference. Claudia was avenged!—and she had the spirit to pursue her advantage, by listening, with her sweetest smiles, to the whispered flatteries distilled, on either side, into her ears. She carefully averted her observation from the fickle Duke; but she suspected, and with justice, that he was equally dissatisfied with *her*, with Sir Comyne, and with himself.

Frederick Lorimer, in the mean time, had dexterously secured a chair next to that of Eleanor Willingham; and as she had been conducted to the supper-table by Lord Robert Lorton, *he* at least had nothing to fear from a rival.

"Do you often join Lady Barringhurst's parties?" inquired Eleanor.

"This is my first appearance here; and I insist upon it that you bestow your patronage on me, in order that I may appear very lively and agreeable, and be invited again. I have given you out as my cousin; your reputation is, therefore, in some degree implicated in my success."

"I see nothing here to justify any violent effort either on your part or mine. Lady Robert's set of friends is, at least, ten years too old for us;—no dancing—no music—no animation."

"I have not time to spare for fastidiousness. In a month I shall leave England for a considerable period; and my immediate business is to crowd as much happiness into that space of time as I possibly can. Lady Robert Lorton is your friend;—at her house, and in her little circle, I shall be secure of seeing *you*, and I have consequently no happiness to seek elsewhere."

"To what part of the Continent are you bound?—We have friends established in divers countries—can our letters be of any service to you?"

"Do not ask me! I have already forgotten whither I am going. Three nights ago, I could have enlarged surprisingly upon my tour, its views, and intentions;—but from last night I date the period of a new existence; and now I remember nothing but that I am a miserable hopeless younger brother."

"Your words sound very despondingly; and yet I see nothing but triumph in your countenance."

"Indeed!—how shall I account for the hypocrisy of my face which does so little justice to my feelings?"

"Allow *me* to unravel the mystery. Your sensations have no twofold power. You are very happy just now. You have an excellent supper before you;—your Champagne is well-iced; the society around you is in good humour;

the room is brilliantly lighted and of a comfortable temperature.—What can you desire more? By anticipating the penalties of the steam-packet and the dirty inns you are about to encounter, you would only render yourself uneasy and tiresome; and *I* should only have to remember you as a disagreeable selfish cousin; and rejoice to see Mr. Frederick Lorimer's name announced in the departure list of the Morning Post."

"Thank you—thank you! I rejoice that you have left me no excuse for being melancholy—I rejoice that you command me to 'live while I live;' for, to say the truth, I have no genius for a gentlemanlike despondency. And now will you tell me where you are going next week;—and whether you will dance with me at Almack's, and at Lady Castleville's ball on Thursday?"

"At both with pleasure. Men under sentence of execution, you know, are always indulged in their few last whims. As you are

going away, we must do our best to make you regret England."

General silence was now enjoined; for the celebrated Taafe—a bard whose vocal, and poetic, and satiric powers would singly suffice to insure his immortality—had been prevailed upon to breathe one of those exquisite melodies which form a distinguishing branch of our national music. This faultless effort was followed by a duet between the poet and Henry Mul grave; a performance which spoke far more fervently to the feelings of the audience than any laboured professional exhibition; and the little party separated with the impression of a most delightful evening to swell the store of their social remembrances.

Mr. Lorimer, enveloped in his mantle, walked homewards with a lighter step than ever wore out the everlasting granite of London; murmuring to himself the last stanza of Mr. Taafe's enchanting ballad; and concealing within his bosom a sprig of heath from Eleanor's nosegay,

a relic of poor Mary Willingham's good-natured sacrifice. He was as much in love as a young man in his twenty-first year ought always to be.

CHAPTER XII.

Prenons le maintien d'un homme en place?
Picard.

General De Vesci, the opulent uncle of Lady Maria Willingham, was one of those empty, pompous, good-looking, well-intentioned men, who make excellent Governors of Colonies under the influence of a shrewd secretary and learned judge; provided they have sufficient interest in the Cabinet at home to varnish over an occasional blunder; and sufficient temperance of mind to bear with a ministerial reproof or two, conveyed in a private letter.

The General was a worthy, upright man, incapable of an ignoble action; but he had been

accustomed for so many years to have his movements and measures suggested to him by a beetle-browed, quill-in-hand man, whose discourse was strengthened by inexhaustible arguments and precedents, and legal admonitions, that he felt himself exceedingly puzzled on his return to England, after a colonial exile of forty years, to order his own boots or discharge his own butler.

Under these circumstances, it would have been a merciful interposition had the destinies bestowed upon him an active, intelligent, managing wife—such, for instance, as his own niece, Lady Maria. But one of those strange inconsistencies, so prevalent in the assortments of human wedlock, had matched him with one of the most inert, lazy, dozy, amiable nonentities in the world. It was seldom that poor Mrs. De Vesci appeared thoroughly awake; and if such an appurtenance as a mind had originally been allotted to her, she had certainly mislaid it in her childhood, and passed the re-

mainder of her life in learning to dispense with its influence. With her easy-chair, however, her fat lap-dog, and her *vinaigrette*, she was as happy as a soulless body can be.

Now this total deficiency of energy was the more remarkable, inasmuch as the sleeping beauty was sprung from a race of human fidgets, who regarded tranquillity, whether moral or physical, as a state of most demoralized stagnation. The Westlands were a very numerous family, who were not only in perpetual motion, but all their movements had an ascending impetus. Place a Westland in the profound darkness of some bucketless well, and you would have found him in ten minutes standing high and dry beside the brink;—to use an expression of that sarcastic traveller, Jefferson Hogg, "they were always knocking their foreheads against the sky." It was "my brother, the Commissioner"—"my cousin, the Chairman"—"my uncle, the Director"—"my nephew, the Secretary"—it was Sir Thomas

Westland—Sir Robert—Sir Arthur—Sir Hew! —After these explanations, it is unnecessary to add that the Westlands were a Caledonian clan; that they had risen on each others' shoulders; that the Commissioner underwrote the Director, and the Chairman endorsed the Secretary. The legend of the French coin, "*Union et Force,*" had elevated them into the highest public consideration.

In allying himself with such a family, Major De Vesci—he was then only a poor honourable —had overlooked the temptations of birth and beauty, in favour of those of interest and shrewdness. He felt persuaded that Miss Westland's uncles, cousins, and nephews, would push him on in his profession, and in this he was not disappointed; and that Miss Westland's comely self would prove a stirring, manœuvring, aspiring woman, ready and willing to scold his servants and legislate his affairs. But in this he decidedly reckoned without his hostess. It was fortunate for his love of ease

that his rise was sufficiently rapid to afford him the succour of aides-de-camp during the war, and secretaries, clerks, registrars, and particularly privy-councillors, during the piping times of peace. Notwithstanding his connexion with the Westland dynasty, government took very good care that he should have neither opportunity nor excuse for acting or judging for himself; but he wore his regimentals on public days with a very good grace; and sat at the head of his table in a manner which proved highly conciliatory to the whole colony.

Like every human thing beside connected with the house of Westland, General De Vesci, without anxiety and without exertion—nay! almost insensibly, found that he had acquired a very handsome fortune by eating currie and drinking salt-petred claret. For forty years these avocations, and the catastrophic curtailment of his military pigtail, had been his only exertions; yet, through some error authorized by the genius of finance, he had become pos-

sessed of vested funds to the amount of ten thousand a-year. The Lieutenant-Governor assured him that it was impossible he could have accumulated so large a sum of money, without at the same time acquiring a liver complaint; and having lent, with officious and official cunning, "A Treatise on blue pill," to Mrs. De Vesci, the devoted couple soon began to see visions of Cheltenham, and to dream dreams of Portland-place. In process of purser's despatches, the worthy Governor's resignation was received and accepted in Downing-street; and Colonel Document, C. B.—the proprietor of the treatise—was appointed to reign in his stead!

On the arrival of "the good teak country-built ship, the Harry Inglis," in the docks, poor General De Vesci, like most Colonial exiles of forty years standing, found that he had outlived all his family and half his contemporaries; and it was not until he had imbibed several ton of the Cheltenham waters,

and hailed the return of his niece, Lady Maria, from the Continent, that he could be prevailed upon to bestow his hearty forgiveness upon himself for having followed the crafty Document's advice. Yet even with this solitary scion of his family tree, he did not feel completely satisfied. He had been so long accustomed to the slumberous indolence of Eastern ladies, and to the still more somnolent self-extinction of his domestic partner, that he found Lady Maria's Gallic animation fatiguing, and the liveliness of her daughters extremely unbecoming. There were many domestic points too which he could not immediately reconcile to his feelings. Lady Maria had never been able to give a very distinct account of the final destination of a certain yellow parrot which he had formerly sent over to his sister-in-law, her dowager parent;—and Claudia and Eleanor had taken the liberty, in his presence, of pronouncing Atar of Roses to be a plebeian and insupportable perfume!

He was too cordial-hearted, however, to cherish any malice against the offenders; and excepting that he could not bribe them to waste as much time as he desired in his gilded desart in Portman-square, he had very little fault to find with the Willinghams. I have said that he was a tall, showy, fine-looking man; and as many of his droppers-in and habitual diners found it their interest to assure him that his handsome nieces exactly resembled him, he soon grew nearly as fond of them as of himself. As he interfered very little in their personal diversions, and was always prompt to adorn them with a new dress or new necklace for a new fête, Claudia and Eleanor were very well satisfied, meanwhile, to re-pay the General's kindness by walking or riding with him, or by singing Mrs. De Vesci into her habitual evening doze. At length, however, as uncles—and particularly *rich* uncles—will do, he took it into his well-powdered head to grow officious and disagreeable.

It were unjust to allow the responsibility of such a change to rest solely upon his own ex-governatorial shoulders. Although he boasted no longer of secretary, or judge advocate, to supply him with motives, yet extrinsic influence was not wanting. He had the whole tribe of Westland to prompt him into action; and as they dined in Portman-square often enough to strengthen their collateral connexion with the Willinghams, they were sufficiently obliging to inscribe the names of his nieces in their own family catalogue; and to calculate upon Claudia's charms among their own ways and means of rising in the world.

"My dear General," observed Sir Hew Westland, the Major General and K.C.B. of the omniscient gang, "are you aware that all London is talking of a marriage between the Duke of Lisborough and the eldest Miss Willingham?"

"Mere rumour! my dear Sir, mere idle rumour, you may rely upon it. My niece

Lady Maria has been passing the holidays at Calmersfield Park—an occurrence of no especial moment—since the rank of the De Vesci family, and an ancient alliance with the house of Lorton, absolutely *entitle* her Ladyship to association with his Grace; and this slight coincidence has been magnified by the gossips of London, and the prying impertinence of the newspapers, into a matrimonial connexion."

"Ah!" interrupted Sir Thomas, the Director, filling his glass with claret as he spoke, "we know how to receive *your* diplomatic explanation, General. But the fact is, my dear Sir, the thing is no longer a mystery; and you must therefore allow me to offer my congratulations."

"It is, at least, a mystery to *me*," rejoined the General pompously; "and if you will interrogate your sister, I think she will satisfactorily confirm my explanation. Annabella, my dear!" elevating his voice with a view to penetrate poor Mrs. De Vesci's impracticable ears; "have

you any reason to suppose that either of my nieces is under any sort of matrimonial engagement?"

"My dear, did you speak to me?"

"The General inquires, sister, whether you are aware that Miss Willingham is going to be married to the Duke of Lisborough?"

"I should not be much surprised if she were going to be married to somebody."

"Certainly not, my dear sister. So lovely a girl—what could be more natural?—But what is your *particular* reason for expecting such a thing just now?"

"I beg your pardon."

"What makes you think that Claudia is engaged?" inquired the General, very loud, and somewhat angrily.

"Oh! nothing, my dear, nothing! Only she was here this morning, and I was telling her how very uneasy I was all day yesterday about my Angola cat."

"Well?"

"And she said—I forgot what it was she said—but she did not seem to care the least about poor Minette."

Sir Robert pushed the ponderous decanter impatiently towards his cousin the Commissioner, who was busy with a very long pinch of snuff.

'Seriously, my dear De Vesci, were *I* in your place, I should think it my duty to inquire a little into this business. After all, *you* stand, as it were, *in loco parentis* to these young women. Lady Maria is a very estimable person, but it may be doubted whether she have stamina enough to conduct a negociation of so much delicacy and moment. Women, you know, General—women are too easily swayed by their passions to proceed to business with fitting deliberation;—and considering the importance of an alliance with the Duke of Lisborough, I think it would have been only respectful and becoming on her Ladyship's part, had she referred herself, in the first instance, to your opinion."

"And so she does refer herself to her uncle's opinion," drawlingly interrupted Mrs. De Vesci, who was soaking sponge biscuits for her fat lapdog. "It was but yesterday she was consulting him about laying in a stock of East India Madeira; and the General sent her in twelve dozen this morning—didn't you, General?"

"Macclesfield announced half an hour ago, that the candles were lighted in the drawing-room, Annabella," observed the ex-Governor emphatically;—so emphatically, that Sir Hew arose and opened the dining-room door for the egress of his portly cousin's rustling lustring dress; while Mrs. De Vesci, with a wine-glass in one hand, and a collection of almonds for her parrot in the other, rolled herself, as if upon castors, out of the room.

"I certainly consider the matter worth attending to," resumed the General, stretching himself, and considerably relieved by her exit. "Sir Joseph Willingham is a very respectable man. God forbid that I should disparage the

intellect of a dignitary of the church and an ancient Baronet." (He loved to have a fling at the new-fangled honours of his stupid wife's relations.) "But after all, Sir Joseph Willingham is by no means a man of the world—is a mere provincial; and it is therefore no undue assumption on my part, I trust, to assert that *I* am far better qualified myself to bring an affair of this kind to a crisis."

"Certainly, certainly!—I have very little doubt that a little judicious interference on your part, would bring his Grace's intentions to a decision."

"I shall give my unbiassed attention to the business," said the General, frowning himself into a reflective air; "for in all probability the Duke of Lisborough is only waiting for some overture from the head of Lady Maria Willingham's family. My nephew, Lord De Vesci, is still in Ireland, and I am therefore authorized in considering myself as *pro tempore* the head of the house."

The conversation now turned upon the high importance of the Lorton family, whether financially or parliamentarily considered; and the Duke was praised—as opulent Dukes are generally praised—for all those universal minor virtues which can be easily fitted on to every human character. The Westlands decided that his Grace was very superior to the ordinary run of young men of the day; and that it would be Miss Willingham's own fault if she did not become, before the close of the season, the liege lady of himself and Lisborough House.

On the following morning, long before the exterior residue of its eggs and French rolls had been removed from the breakfast-table in Seymour-street, the General entered the room with a very admonitory air. He listened impatiently to Lady Maria's account of a dinner at Lord Lorimer's the day before; and in the midst of her anticipation of Mrs. Grandison's ball that evening, he burst forth into a preconcerted harangue, admitting of no interruption.

So widely, indeed, did its arguments extend—so much did he say of the claims of kindred, of personal affection, family alliances, and his own especial predilection for herself and her daughters—that Lady Maria immediately decided her uncle was come to announce the signature of his will;—and even the girls, who were in sanguine expectation of a morning visit from the Duke of Lisborough, and who were therefore in an agony of anxiety to go and put the finishing stroke to their toilet, judged it advisable to assume a sentimental air, and linger patiently over their coffee-cups.

Words, therefore, are insufficient to depict the consternation which pervaded the countenances of the three, when General De Vesci unexpectedly diverged into the views he had recently imbibed from the Westland clan; setting forth his intentions of immediate interference, and insinuating some trifling displeasure that his opinions on the subject had not been already consulted.

Claudia and Eleanor telegraphed a look of despair across the table, while Lady Maria mildly attempted to moderate the excess of his zeal.

"My dear Sir," she exclaimed, "can you for a moment suppose, that had the Duke's attentions to my daughter assumed any thing beyond the form of common courtesy, you would have been permitted to remain in ignorance of the affair? Oh! my dear, dear uncle! you must surely be too well persuaded of my poor girl's grateful affection towards you to indulge in such an illusion. The Duke of Lisborough has done no more than pay us ordinary attention in requital of former hospitality;—but the world is *so* jealous—*so* ill-natured!"

"I perceive nothing jealous or ill-natured in projecting an alliance between the Duke and Miss Willingham."

"*You*, my dear General, you, who know so much of the world—of the great world—cannot

fail to recognize that this sort of premature report is almost prohibitory of the event; and that the most delicate forbearance is requisite in conducting an affair, which the interest of so many different persons is leagued to circumvent."

"That is the *very* consideration, my dear Maria, which induces me to come forward at the present juncture. I believe I may say it without compliment to myself, that I, who have so long been engaged in a diplomatic career—I, who have had the responsibilities of government—his Majesty's representative government—hanging upon my hands—can pretend to the adjustment of a negociation of this description far better than even yourself."

"But no *negociation* has been yet thought of, dear uncle," impatiently interrupted Eleanor.

The General waved an angry negative with his ungloved hand.

"Nor will *ever* be, Miss Eleanor, without some effort on my part. As your nearest male

relative, it becomes a duty incumbent on myself to see that no improper trifling in the Duke of Lisborough's conduct throws a slur upon any female connected, however remotely, with the family of De Vesci. I shall therefore take some strong and immediate measure towards an explanation."

Claudia and Eleanor silently hazarded a glance of sympathy towards each other.

"Or perhaps I should acknowledge—for *we* official men"—with a self-important smile—"we official men are not in the habit of hanging fire on such occasions—perhaps I should candidly avow—that I have already taken it."

"Good Heavens, Sir!" ejaculated the usually impassive Claudia, suddenly rising and clasping her hands, "what *have* you done?"

"And without so much as consulting us," added Eleanor, with indignation.

"My dear nieces, I trust I require no suggestion from yourselves, or *any* one, relative to the line of conduct to be pursued on an occasion

involving a point of family honour.—I have simply done my duty!"

"Well, Sir?" faintly inquired Lady Maria. The General drew himself up with an air of considerable dignity. "I have invited the Duke of Lisborough to dinner on the 4th of next month!"

Relieved by this very unexpected announcement, the girls gazed upon each other with a smile of mutual congratulation. Still, although the evil was of a very minor kind, they felt that it *was* an evil. They were well aware that the Duke was by no means in the habit of wandering from his own orbit; or rather, that living as the centre of attraction to a little sphere of his own, and possessing the power of commanding pleasure and amusement, according to the suggestion of his personal whims, he seldom placed himself at the mercy of other people's invitations. But regrets were vain—the deed was done; and it only remained for them to qualify, by their own ingenuity, its appalling consequences.

"But my dear General!" observed Lady Maria, with as much courtesy as she could assume, while boiling with indignation; "your acquaintance in town is at present so very limited—you have as yet taken so little trouble towards the renewal of your former connexions, that I cannot conceive how you will ever make out a party to meet the Duke of Lisborough. You must be aware that he confines himself to a very exclusive set."

"In honouring my dinner-table with his presence, he extends it for the occasion to *my* guests, whoever they may be; and I trust they are never of a class to reflect discredit on his Grace."

"*Discredit!* oh! dear no, Sir! But fashion you know, my dear uncle, fashion is a most arbitrary, a most peremptory code."

"I conceive, Madam, that a certain rank in life is sufficient to elevate one wholly above its influence. Fashion, Lady Maria, may become a badge of distinction to an upstart such as a Mr. Brummell; but I presume to imagine that

persons of rank, such as the Duke of Lisborough and General de Vesci, are exempted from so contemptible a tax."

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders, and left the table in despair.

"Besides, your Ladyship appears to forget that his Grace is as closely my relative as your own."

"I am well aware that there is some remote connexion between the Lortons and De Vescis; but *our* acquaintance with the Duke arose from frequent meetings on the Continent, where we moved in the same circle."

"*Remote* connexion? Surely you are not ignorant that James, the thirteenth Duke of Lisborough, was son to Lord Adolphus Lorton, by Mildred the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose grandmother was a De Vesci?—REMOTE connexion!—I was explaining the whole affair the other morning at Brookes's to Lord Robert Lorton; by whose air and address, by the way, I was by no means

captivated. He has all the coldness and listlessness of the late Duke, without any of his graceful dignity. While I was talking to him, there came up a very elegant young man, who requested his Lordship to present him to me as a near relative of your late mother, Lady de Vesci's;—a Mr. Lorimer, a very respectful, agreeable, modest young gentleman. He spoke of having recently made your acquaintance; and I invited him to visit me in Portman-square."

"I consider Mr. Frederick Lorimer a very forward person," said Lady Maria pettishly, while Eleanor re-seated herself at the table. "I have no idea of younger brothers presuming upon family connexion to push themselves into one's society. There is nothing so disadvantageous as to have a parcel of detrimentals loitering and lounging about a house frequented by young ladies of a marrying age. But to return to your dinner, General. *Whom* do you think of inviting to meet the Duke?"

"Yourselves, of course; and the ladies of a party once settled, the men become of minor importance. I can easily fill up my table."

"Pardon me, dear Sir—the male guests of a dinner-party are by far the most difficult to adjust to the taste of their own sex. To form an unpleasant female acquaintance is an affair of minor moment;—but to be forced into collision with a vulgar or obscure man, would be martyrdom to a person so fastidious as the Duke."

"I flatter myself Mrs. De Vesci's family is neither vulgar nor obscure. I shall invite all the Westlands."

"Good God! you surely do not think of such a thing! Men who were never dreamt of on the southern side of Oxford-street!"

"Lady Maria Willingham, you forget yourself. Sir Hew Westland is a distinguished officer in his Majesty's service——"

"Of whom one never hears, except in the

newspaper-list of a *lévée*—or on occasion of a frame-breaking at Nottingham."

"Sir Thomas Westland, Madam, is a Director of the Honourable East India Company."

Lady Maria groaned.

"Sir Philip is a banker of considerable eminence, and is, moreover, married to the niece of the late Attorney General."

"My dear uncle," interrupted Eleanor, who was less in awe of the General than either her mother or sister; "what are all these people to the Duke? He never heard of them, nor *will* ever hear of them in the course of his existence! Except in such places as Bedford-square, or Devonshire-place, the Westland family rank among the nonentities of the earth. Invite them to meet your stock-broker, your solicitor, or your physician, and they will pass for High Mightinesses;—their names and designations will maintain them. But in a certain set, to be unknown is to be infamous. The Duke of Lisborough never finds himself among strangers;

and he would consider it an affront to be invited among a tribe of Hottentots like the Westlands."

"Upon *my* word, Miss Eleanor," the General began ——

"Dearest Nelly! how can you be so imprudent?" interrupted Claudia.

"It is much better to speak out, in such a crisis," persisted Eleanor Willingham bluntly. "My uncle's only wish on this occasion is to benefit ourselves; he is not aware of the Duke's fastidious and supercilious ways; and it is much more candid to forewarn him of the truth."

General De Vesci, who was really a kind-hearted man, appeared pacified by this explanation, and inclined to treat the whole business jocosely.

"Well—my fair counsellor!—and *you*, who are so well versed in the art and science of dinner-giving—what amendment do *you* suggest? Who, of all my acquaintance, are fine enough to be admitted into our scheme?"

"Oh! you must give Mamma *carte blanche*, and she will arrange it all with Mrs. De Vesci."

"In the mean time, you will allow me to learn the names of my future guests."

"Oh! there is the new Neapolitan ambassador, Prince Agostino Sciarrha, on whom you called yesterday. The Princess is our particular friend, and a very charming woman. *They*, I am sure, will be delighted to come; and they will bring one of their *attachés*, who is a great *protégé* of the Duke of Lisborough's, the Duca di Villa Armagnano."

The General, who was a great lover of great names, became somewhat appeased by this euphonious promise. "And your relations, the Lorimers, Lady Maria?—Lord Lorimer left his card on me at the beginning of the season, and her Ladyship and Mrs. De Vesci have exchanged visits;—only Annabella is so unobservant that she never can be made to distinguish Lady Lorimer from her daughters. How many of

the family ought I to include in the invitation?"

"The Lorimers! They are as *mauvais ton* as the Westlands!—They belong to a class of the nobility who are utterly unknown in the fashionable world;—who lend themselves out as stars, to all the vulgar second-rate parties; and affect to be too wise or too good for the *beau monde*, which despises them. If you like, you can invite the eldest son. He lives very little with his own family, and will probably achieve better things;—he is considered a rising young man."

"And Mr. Frederick?"

"A younger brother who is not in Parliament, and who neither writes books, nor is considered attached to some leading woman of fashion, is a mere blank," said Lady Maria, angrily. "Pray, Sir, spare us the infliction of any such Mr. Johns and Mr. Thomases. You are acquainted with Mr. Russell—Beau Rus-

sell, I mean. Ask *him*, and Sir Comyne Wallace, whom I presented to you at the Opera. Old Lord Hopemell is not a bad style of man, although rather out of date ;—and I should think the Duke would not object to meet Lord Masterton, the ex-Governor-General, although they differ so widely in politics. But, at all events, Sir, you can wait till you receive the Duke's answer ;—it is by no means certain at present that he will accept your invitation."

"By Heavens ! you are all Lisborough mad !" exclaimed the General, closing his snuff-box with an irritable jerk, and taking up his hat in a pet. "I might have invited half the Royal Family, with a quarter the fuss."

"The Royal family ! I should think so," reiterated Eleanor, flippantly. "Who ever thought of comparing the Royal family in point of *fashion* with the Duke of Lisborough ?"

"Stark mad !" muttered the General, pulling his hat over his brows, and leaving the house. "Poor unfortunate girls ! Their residence on

the Continent has deprived them of even the moderate portion of understanding they received as their birthright. His Grace, in marrying Claudia, will do well to provide strait-waistcoats for the whole family!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Voilà de jeunes gens qui ont fait trop tôt le tour de leur planète. *Sénac de Meilhan.*

"WHAT did you lose after I left the table last night, Stapylford?" inquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Lord Stapylford's son, who was lounging on the down sofa of his apartment at Mivart's. "Any thing heavy?"

"On my soul! I forget," replied the yawning Stapylford, passing a white hand through his perfumed curls, and crumpling with the other the Morning Post into a toss-ball. "Tichborne!" said he, elevating his drawl to address a particular friend, who, dressed as his *double*,

was busily engaged at the breakfast-table, with the wreck of a *pâté de foie gras.* "Tichborne! what did I lose? I saw you booking it all."

"Don't destroy my small relic of appetite by adverting to the subject, there's a worthy fellow. We lost last night—for we played together—more than it is pleasant to think of this morning."

Sir Comyne went to the window, and began to polish Mr. Mivart's plate-glass with the tassel of his cane, by way of concealing a smile. Both, from the active evidence before him, and from his certain knowledge that Tichborne had not a shilling of his own, either to spend or to hazard, he thought it improbable the young gentleman's appetite would suffer on the present occasion.

"Why were you not both at Mrs. Grandison's ball? Your family were all there, Tichborne; and you know, Stapylford, I offered to get you a card."

"Oh! curse balls!" replied the *double,* ring-

ing for a glass of Curaçoa or Scubac, to qualify the unctuous *pâté*. "We looked in at the Opera for an hour, and saw all Mrs. Grandison's set in their ball finery; but except Lady Robert Lorton, who was sparkling like an ill-set diamond in a hideous hat, and the two pretty Willinghams, there was nothing to tempt a man to forget himself into the milk-and-water common-place of a ball-room."

"That Lady Barringhurst, your cousin, is a very lovely piece of human nature," said the boy-voluptuary, who was busy with his ball; "she looks like a swansdown-muff, or my poodle, after he has been washed in milk of roses."

Tichborne echoed the witling with the ready laugh of a *double;* but his cheek was flushed, and his eye sparkled with an angry glance. "And what had you new at Mrs. Grandison's, Wallace?"

"Oh! nothing new. But a thousand old things which might have amused you better

than losing your money at Crockford's. In the first place a supper, the very recollection of which might have superseded the necessity of a further breach upon that ruined *pâté.*"

"We did not sup ill at Crocky's," said young Stapylford, swallowing a glass of Scubac with leisurely enjoyment.

"One never does; but having paid for those gratuitous suppers at the rate of a *rouleau* a mouthful, they always give me a fit of indigestion. Now, at Mrs. Grandison's I felt the cost to be at the expense of a rich banker's vanity. I believe they had the President of the Royal Society to inspect the cooling of the wines—no ice!—it was all a chemical operation;—and the strawberries were brought to table growing in China saucers, that we might hail them in all their horticultural freshness."

"Well imagined!—that Mrs. Grandison is not destitute of genius," observed Tichborne. "But what made *her* give a ball?—it is contrary to the system of her circle."

"Oh! I fancy she is rather breaking out of Lady Robert Lorton's set; she is too vivacious, and not sufficiently well-bred for their indolent easy mode of happiness. She likes a little *tracasserie*—a little mischief to keep her alive;—and her present mania is to achieve the legislation of Lisborough House; she wants to get that overgrown baby into leading-strings."

"Absurd! She has all the influence which beauty—and all the enjoyments which money can give;—besides the adoration of a husband who would pave Portland-place with rubies to please her! Why cannot she be satisfied without throwing away her reputation?"

"*La belle Grandison* has a very active spirit, which cannot exist without the exertion of manœuvring. A difficulty to overcome is a great temptation to a genius like her's."

"But where's the difficulty of winning the attentions of a person so fickle as the Duke of Lisborough?"

"None, I grant you;—but to *retain* them?"

"More trouble than they are worth."

"Than *they* are worth. But you omit from the balance the dear delight of giving pain;—the pleasure of irritating Our Lady of the farthingale—the austere Lady Grayfield—and baffling the manœuvres of the lovely Claudia Willingham."

"Or making that simple little daisy, Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, shut up its leaves and die."

"By heavens! it was quite exquisite to see the Duke the other night at Lord Monmouth's concert. You know he is a furious amateur, and cannot endure to be flirted with, within scrape of an orchestra; so when Mrs. Grandison grew too kind, and too tiresome, Lisborough went and took refuge behind the skirts of Lady Grayfield's clothing, by way of not knowing her, and of being shocked at her proceedings."

"The advantage of having a virtuous sister!"

exclaimed Sir Comyne. "It is really lucky that the Duke has such a buckler of defence against his fair friends; for upon my soul it is disgusting to see the manner in which he is invaded on all sides. And yet, faith! I should not dislike playing *Il Turco* for a few weeks after his Grace's fashion—letting all the fair Odalisques come and kiss the dust of my sublime feet. *Your* turn will come soon, Stapylford. When you inherit your uncle's fortune, and put on your coronet, you will find yourself obliged to assume a spiked collar, *à la* bull-dog, to escape being worried."

"I detest women," drawled the youthful Alcibiades. "They are so cursedly selfish. The strongest affection never surmounts *their* egotism, while from *us* they expect every possible sacrifice."

Tichborne laughed heartily, and Sir Comyne Wallace ironically, at this sally.

"You know them, at present, through their worst representatives. I am persuaded, my

dear fellow, you never found courage to enter into conversation with any thing in the shape of a lady, except that frightful sister of Charles Willingham's, at Heddeston."

"Whom old Monteagle, my grandmother, seriously advised me to marry! By way of frightening the ancient soul into an apoplexy, I told her I was already engaged to little Minnie, who will never have a shilling——"

"Hush! here comes Lorimer! he is somehow or other connected with those Willinghams. Lorimer, my fine fellow—how are you?"

"Why looks your Grace so heavily to-day?" inquired Stapylford.

"Because he is in *dis*grace," said Tichborne, laughing at his own wit. "Its papa has protested a bill—or its mamma——"

"My dear Tichborne," said Frederick Lorimer, sarcastically, "be satisfied with quizzing your own parents; mine must remain my especial property."

"But you have really a most woe-begone and indignant air," said young Stapylford. "Out with it, man;—swear a little at somebody or other, and you will be better. Who has affronted you?—which of your friends here present is to be your 'friend?' Who stands first to be your second?"

A waiter now entered the room with certain despatches from Mr. Stapylford's head groom to Mr. Tichborne; on the strength of which, having swallowed two consecutive glasses of liqueur, drawn his waistcoat and black stock into their respective and relative positions before the looking-glass, and filled his morocco cigar-case from Stapylford's tin-treasury, he announced his intention of proceeding to the stables; where some mysterious operation was going on, which was said by Irish Bob to necessitate his inspection. There was nothing, indeed, particularly degrading to Lord Henry Tichborne's son in the office of stud-groom, which he thus appeared to arrogate to himself;—

the horses which bore Mr. Stapylford's name being far more his own property. He rode them all the winter at Melton—all the summer in the Park; and whatever money was won upon them in the course—at Hampton, or Goodwood, or Croxton Park—all found its way into Mr. Tichborne's pocket.

"I am come to inquire whether you have any message to Charles Willingham, or any commands to Oxford at large?" said Lorimer, as soon as the *double* had sworn his way out of the room. "I am off by the mail this evening."

"And what says the fair Eleanor to your scheme of departure?" said Sir Comyne, apparently as much relieved as Frederick Lorimer by the absence of their dear friend's dear friend. "Methought I saw you whispering her somewhat closely in Mrs. Grandison's Abyssinian tent-room last night; and it seemed to me that she turned neither a deaf nor an angry ear."

"What can a wretched younger brother like

myself find to urge that is likely to win the attention of a lovely girl like *herself?*"

"That which pleases most lovely girls;—that you are madly in love with her; and are hesitating between Prussic acid and oxalic, to put a period to your woes;—just such trash as I talked the other night to her fair sister Claudia, by way of exasperating that leather-and-prunella automaton, Lisborough;—who, by the way, takes the liberty of trifling with women's affections in a manner that often induces me to wish I had a pretty sister of my own, for the prospect of calling him out."

"And yet you jestingly recommend me to trifle in a similar manner with Eleanor Willingham's?"

"*I* recommend any measure in jest? Believe me, my counsels were as grave as if they had been uttered by the Lord Chancellor in the most erudite of all his wigs. I advised no *feigning*, but a simple confession of *feeling* which I knew to exist."

"With a view to obtain some such concession in my turn?—a concession which must inevitably insure the misery of both!"

"You seem bursting with magnanimity this morning; but you will not, at least, deny the fact of your being desperately in love?"

"Like a fool, or a madman!—Eleanor is a sort of cousin of mine, although we have never met till lately;—and this connexion has advanced our intimacy with such miraculous facility, that I have seen her more in ten days than one sees of girls in general during a London-month. Knowing that my stay in England was so limited, I felt that I had a right to make it as happy as I could, without calculating that the misery of my residence on the Continent would thereby become increased a thousand fold."

"*Misery?* pho! pho!" exclaimed Stapylford. "Make the best of your way to Paris, and you will forget her in a month."

"You judge me, my dear Stapylford, by your own feelings."

"Not I, by Jupiter!—a week, or even a day, if passed according to my own good liking, would do the business for *me*."

"But unfortunately I am bound *not* to Paris, but to Leyden; where I fancy I should find the Waters of Oblivion more difficult of attainment."

"But I do not understand what takes you to-night to Oxford, a place which it costs me so much pains and hazard to keep away from. Is it your passion, or your prudence—eh! Frederick?"

"Both!—I want to inquire of Charles Willingham whether his cousin is ever likely to be in possession of a shilling, before I presume to offer her my own younger brother's eighteenpence;—I think it decent, in respect to both our families, that we should make up half-a-crown between us!"

"A considerable waste of time and trouble," observed Stapylford, arranging the *amadou* of his *cigarette*, which Tichborne had politely

thrown open on the chiffonier. "Why don't you run away with her at once?"

"Run where—*in* what—*with* what?"

"I will lend you my travelling-carriage; and you can go to Gretna Green first, and Botham's, at Salt Hill, afterwards."

"And the King's Bench in the third place!—But who is to pay the cost of the expedition?—*I* have nothing but my dressing-box and a brace of greyhounds to raise money upon."

"My last loan is not exhausted, notwithstanding my last night's losses;—and five hundred are much at your service," said Stapylford listlessly. "I will give you a draft on my banker—and you can be off this evening."

"My dear Stapylford," exclaimed Lorimer, "you are so accustomed to find Tichborne and Co. dipping into your purse, as if it were their own, that you have forgotten scruples can even exist on such a subject. But Brook-street is not the Rue de la Paix, therefore *I* have no immediate excuse for the annihilation of memory

which you predicted just now.—*I* cannot contrive to forget that I am a beggar—or a cadet —(synonimous terms, you know)—not for to-day or to-morrow, or till I came of age; but for the remainder of my hang-dog days. You must therefore excuse me from borrowing money which it will remain wholly out of my power to return at any future period—and——"

"I wish Tichborne were here to extend his ears, eyes, and lungs at such an extravagant declaration," observed Sir Comyne in a parenthesis.

—"And from running away with a pretty cousin of my own, who deserves a more honourable death than starvation on the Surrey side of the bridges."

"As you please," said Stapylford. "But since you are so economically inclined, let me still recommend you to retain the Oxford journey as the last resource of your despair."

"I have resolved upon speaking to my father before I go abroad; and it will be necessary to

provide myself with particulars previous to the explanation."

"A very rational precaution!—but you are going fifty superfluous miles in search of them. I can inform you, on the best authority, that your goddess is as portionless as you can desire. She has a little fairy of a sister living at Heddeston Court, with old Melchisedec Willingham, with whom I have been half in love myself ever since she has been out of leading-strings;—and the Dowager, my Monteagle grandame, has duly forewarned me every holidays, 'Montague—Montague—beware how you entangle yourself with that child!—Fall in love with her cousin and welcome!—but Minnie will be a beggar to the end of her days.'"

"Minnie!" exclaimed Lorimer, starting from the sofa on which he had thrown himself in a very lover-like attitude. "Is *that* little girl the daughter of Lady Maria?—How strange that Eleanor should never mention her!—But now you remind me that, without referring to

Melchisedec, as you obligingly denominate Charles Willingham's respected sire, I can gather all the particulars I wish to know from my friend Mary;—I will be off directly to Grosvenor-square."

"But you will find that armadillo, her sententious Ladyship, stationed in the drawing-room," said Stapylford.

"Oh, she will be busy reading the Book of Martyrs, or the Pilgrim's Progress, and she never disturbs herself on my account. As Charles's friend, I am looked upon as the friend of the whole house. Or I will persuade Mary to come and walk with me in the square."

"You are a lucky dog to be trusted in *tête-à-tête* walks with young ladies," said Wallace, taking up his hat.

"Melchisedec knows that his daughter and her fifty thousand pounds are as safe with me as with her grandfather," said Lorimer.

"On her *mother's* side I believe she never *had* a grandfather," observed Stapylford. "But

she is ugly enough to be safe any where, with any body.

"No strictures on Mary Willingham;—she is the best creature breathing, and I love her like a sister," replied Frederick Lorimer.

"I have a great regard for Mary myself," said Stapylford, extending his finger in adieu, as they were leaving the room; "but I think *I* love her more like my grandmother. My compliments to her, Fred.—but you need not tell her so. And now I must go and see what Tichborne is doing."

"Stapylford is a fine fellow," observed Sir Comyne Wallace to Frederick Lorimer, as they sauntered arm-in-arm up Brook-street. "A gentleman in every pulse and every feeling;—I wish he were in better hands than Tichborne's—who is ruining him at an immoderate pace, and without allowing the poor boy to take out his ruin's-worth in pleasure."

"Tichborne is an enigma to me," replied Lorimer. "Knowing him to be such another

Squire Lackland as myself, I cannot make out how he gets on."

"He was an enigma to *me* five years ago; but now I know London better, and Tichborne only too well."

"His uncle, the Duke of Arlington, allows him two hundred a-year; on the strength of which he dresses better than any man in town—has the best equipage, the best valet;—belongs to all the clubs, and lives in the most exclusive society. Now, Lord Henry, his father—who is one of the respectable old pig-tail and Boodle school—has not a doit to bestow on him, and has several daughters to marry—or maintain."

"All very true! and as soon as Tichborne—who is a gross sensualist, and as unprincipled as a horse-dealer—became aware of all his hereditary deficiencies and misfortunes, he struck out a new profession for himself, and became a spendthrift-leech;—a middle-man between the boy-lords and the Israelites;—and it is astonishing how many estates he has already disabled

into nursing-trim.—Tailors, jockeys, coach-makers, jewellers, and all the *avant couriers* of Banco Regis, are ready to kneel for his custom —that is for his *orders;*—and poor Stapylford and Co. become tacitly sacrificed to the compact."

"By Heavens! it is too bad!"

"True; but were they not in *his* hands, or some other of his illustrious confraternity, they would fall into those of sharpers, without even an "Honourable" prefaced to their names, and out of the pale of amenability to a hair-trigger;—fellows to whom a horse-whipping, more or less, would appear of no account, and who would cheat *ad infinitum* accordingly. Your Tichbornes, on the contrary, are within pistol retribution."

"I, you know, am too small game for such a kite to fly at," said Lorimer. "But I remember, last year, he joined me as I was sauntering down Bond-street to Hoby's, where he concluded I was about to give an order; and

when he saw me take out my purse and ask for a stamped receipt, I shall never forget his air of consternation.—'My dear fellow, what in Heaven's name are you about?' said he, drawing me aside. 'For God's sake consider how scarce money is in London just now!'—As if I were making the bootmaker a gratuitous present!—But who is that beautiful woman bowing to you, Wallace?"

"In that green carriage?—Oh! a fair *parvenue!*"

"A Countess, by the emblazonments."

"I mean a *parvenue*-woman of fashion. Although she must be verging on forty, she only commenced her vocation last year; having been hitherto satisfied with provincial nonentityism; coming to town for a change of nurses and a visit to the Exhibition; and returning to the lilacs and nightingales early in May."

"She is very handsome."

"Tolerably handsome, certainly;—but she disfigures herself by adopting every last ultra-

extravagant mode; and renders herself odious by running after all the fine people, like a banker's wife."

"Her rank ought to place her above such a degradation."

"She adores *me* just now—because I am in Lady Robert Lorton's set, who will have nothing to say to her; and as to Lisborough—she would lay foot-cloths of velvet from her house to his, if he would only step over them to visit her. Poor Lady Radbourne passes three hours a day in inditing little solicitation notes, trying to get here, and there, and every where, where she is not wanted. Good bye!—here we are at Sir Joseph's;—and Lady Monteagle's carriage, on the roll for departure, announces that the family are at home.—I wish you joy."

CHAPTER XIV.

Peste, soit la sincérité! c'est un mauvais métier. Désormais j'y renonce, et je ne veux plus dire un mot de vrai.

Molière.

THE event was, however, no source of joy to Frederick; for, as the Monteagle equipage rumbled from the spot, an ethereal smile glanced upon him from its window, and a fair hand was so courteously kissed in his honour, that his heart-quake of the morning returned upon him more vehemently than ever; and by the time he was ushered by a gouty butler—the grand son of the departed Dickinson—to the door of Lady Willingham's formal drawing-room, the divine Eleanor, and her matchless charms of mind and person, had thoroughly repossessed

themselves of his imagination. His countenance was sentimentalized by a thousand tender emotions—but he was spared the perils of a scrutiny;—for her Ladyship was thoroughly engrossed by worthy Mrs. Darnham, and another equally respectable village-neighbour, enveloped in an equally comprehensive woollen shawl; whose matronly details had been of so medical a character as to drive poor Mary to a distant table—where she was hanging over her palette and an exquisite group of flowers. Mr. Lorimer, after the usual compliments to the three destinies who were so mysteriously laying their heads together in awful conclave, proceeded towards Miss Willingham's retreat, and seated himself by her side.

"What beautiful hyacinths, Mary!—they seem starting from the vellum; and how your group has advanced since I saw it last!"

"It is almost a fortnight since you were here," replied Mary, without raising her eyes from her drawing.

"Can it be possible!—I should scarcely have thought it a week!—indeed it appears only a day!—a dear, delightful, dreamy, midsummer-day."

Mary's curiosity was now excited to lift her observation towards the countenance of the enthusiast; and in doing so she discovered that her own was somewhat pale, and that all its bloom appeared concentrated in the eyelids. Frederick instantly decided these effects to arise from the perfume of the flowers she was copying, and the arduous delicacy of her task. He had very little suspicion of his own share in the disfigurement;—he had very little idea how far his own attractions had influenced poor Mary's letter of refusal that morning to Sir William Wyndham; and the lecture of two hours and twenty minutes from her father, which had followed its dispatchal;—that since breakfast she had been compelled to listen to a recital (first and second edition, paternal and maternal) of the rentroll of the Wyndham Park

estate; and to her cousin Eleanor's private recapitulation of all the tender nothings whispered to her by Frederick Lorimer in the course of Mrs. Grandison's ball and supper. Eleanor, it is true, had insisted quite as much on the general charms of the ball—upon the variety and fashion of her partners, and upon the Duke of Lisborough's renewed devotion to her sister Claudia;—Lorimer, and his attachment, had appeared to excite a very minor degree of interest among the pleasures of the evening; but she avowed herself conscious of its existence;—and to be loved by *him* and remain indifferent to the distinction, was a stretch of philosophy utterly beyond poor Mary's comprehension! It is miraculous that the bouquet of hyacinths was not utterly effaced by the flood of silent and bitter tears which had signalized Lady Monteagle's departure, and the cessation of Eleanor Willingham's confidences. But *he* was by her side again; and she could not feel *very* unhappy in Frederick's presence.

"Mary!" said he, "you must bestow that little painting upon me as a *bouquet d'adieu.*—I have only a week longer to remain among you; and when I am far away——"

Mary bent still closer over her work, and was guilty of several random touches.

—"When I am far away, it will serve to remind me of the few last happy days I spent in England!"

"Is Charles aware that so early a period is fixed for your departure?" said she in a low voice.

"Do not say *fixed.*—I cannot bear that odious word.—When I think of all the dangers of absence, Mary—when I consider the admiration with which the world will environ your lovely cousin, I can hardly believe that my courage will be equal to the effort of separation. So sweet a creature—so playfully, yet so harmlessly witty—so original, so *naïve,* so *enjouée* in her manners and ideas—so superior to the common-place routine of *Missy* girls one meets with in London!—Eleanor Willingham com-

bines all the sprightly grace of a Parisian, with the modesty and solid understanding of a true-born Englishwoman. How happened it, Mary, that you never mentioned nor described her to me in all the walks and conversations we have had together at Heddeston?"

The gentle Mary saw nothing overcharged in Frederick Lorimer's description of her cousin; it was enough that *he* thought her an angel to sanctify the beatification in Mary's eyes; nor did she testily vindicate herself from the charge of "unlawfully concealing."—"You forget," said she mildly, "that we were mere children when we parted. Eleanor was always esteemed a very lovely and promising girl; but I remember once reading to you and my brother a passage from her letters, describing the Neapolitan carnival—which appeared to me a masterpiece of lively elegance—and you both said so much of its tone of flippancy and levity, that I closed the letter and never mentioned my cousin's name to you again."

"English school-boys are such pudding-brained oafs!—Dear Eleanor!—what would I give to see one of her graceful effusions now!—I have learned to render her justice; and how delightful to think that my two most esteemed friends are her own nearest relatives—that if I ever have the happiness to call her *mine*, I shall also attain the privilege of naming *you*, dearest Mary—you and Charles—my cousins!"

"Have you—have you any probable chance of such an accomplishment of your wishes?" faltered Mary Willingham, not daring to look up.

"That is exactly the question I am come to ask of yourself."

"Of *me*, Lorimer?"

"You are in Eleanor's confidence.—She regards you far more highly than any other member of her family,—she has too much discernment not to do you ample justice, dear Mary. Now tell me truly—has she not spoken to you of me?—And tell me truly again—have I any hope that she will deign to accept

the devotion of my whole life—of my whole heart?"

Mary was conscious of a painful struggle between the agony of her feelings, and the determination to be perfectly candid;—and the heroism of honesty lent so fervid a flush to her cheek, and so intense a glance to her brow, that for a moment she appeared as lovely as the subject of their debate.

"She *has* spoken of you to me several times, Frederick;—with partiality—with preference—but nothing further. Had she said more, indeed, than that she thought you agreeable, gentlemanly, and well-informed, I should have considered myself bound, as a woman, to keep her secret. But although Eleanor has deposited *no* secret with me implying confidence—I have every reason to believe she has not formed any other attachment."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer fervently; "and thank *you*, my dear kind Mary, for——"

He was not permitted to give a full term to his importunate gratitude; for Dickinson, junior, again throwing open the drawing-room door—announced "Lord Lorimer." Poor Lady Willingham, who saw in the arrival of the pompous and somewhat tedious peer, only an unwelcome interruption to her gratifying flannel-and-caudle colloquy with her village gossips, received him with cold and deliberate equanimity; but when in throwing his large gray cod-like eyes round the room, they finally rested upon Miss Willingham, blushing and trembling—with his own son Frederick—*his younger son*—hanging over her chair—his Lordship puckered his leathern visage into a very peculiar smile, and drew himself up into an extra-elevation of gratified pride. Certain projects, which had more than once glanced across his mind, became condensed into stability by the relative position of the parties; and in the course of his stately strut towards the table to inquire after Miss Mary's health, and interest himself in her avo-

cation, it occurred to his parental foresight that his third son George might be more conveniently forwarded to Leyden; and his second son, Frederick, entered at Cambridge, with a view to orders and the reversionary chance of the living of Heddeston:—including, of course, the daughter of the patron, and her fifty thousand pounds.

Lord Lorimer was at all times a most pompously urbane man; deeply sensible of the mercy of Providence in making him a peer, and elevating him above the sordid uses of the vulgar; and smitten with a most overflowing sympathy with all those of his own calling and degree. To be a nobleman was with him to be a vicegerent of Heaven;—to be a baronet was at least something:—had he lived in the days when the heads of the traitor-lords were exposed on Temple-bar, it is probable that he would have dwindled into a nervous atrophy;—or had he attained years of discretion when Lord Ferrers was hanged, it is certain that he

would have gone into mourning. The ulterior object of his present visit to Grosvenor-square was to offer his felicitations on the reported marriage between Claudia Willingham and his Grace of Lisborough—a catastrophe which he regarded as conferring honour upon her kindred even unto the remotest generation.

"I trust your Ladyship is persuaded," said Lord Lorimer, "of the deep interest with which Lady Lorimer and myself have watched the progress of an event so flattering to a family which has for many years honoured us with its friendship. Lady Maria Willingham is by birth my cousin, and I rejoice in her prosperity; but Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham are by choice my friends, and every incident involving their honour and happiness is important in my estimation."

Mary, who had deserted her drawing-table in order to assist in entertaining her mother's guests, could not but consider this a singular mode of reasoning; but her Lady-mother was

still less inclined to accept Lord Lorimer's absurd plausibilities. Thoroughly out of humour with love and matrimony on Sir William Wyndham's account, she could not bear any allusion to her niece's prospects, and would not hear of being congratulated.

"If your Lordship have any serious reason for believing Sir Joseph's niece to be engaged to the Duke of Lisborough, I can only say that you are more fortunate in obtaining Lady Maria's confidence than *we* have been. She was here this morning, and I beg to say that not a word passed on the subject."

"Come—come, my dear Madam;—this is scarcely using me like a friend—like an *old* friend. It is now eight years—or faith—I believe nine—eh! Frederick?—since you taught that young gentleman of mine to prefer a home at Heddeston Court, to a home at Lorimer Hall. His own motives for the preference I leave him to account for to your Ladyship; but I am not ashamed to acknowledge that

from the period in question—(yes! it was certainly nine years ago) until now—I have never ceased to regard the second parents of a beloved son as my own first friends!"

Lord Lorimer paused, as when expecting the cheers of the House; or of his own county meetings after a clap-trap;—and Lady Willingham, utterly at a loss to conjecture the motives of all this grandiloquent courtesy, filled up the pause with a bow of vague acknowledgment.

"I am fully aware that young ladies are extremely tenacious of having these little affairs prematurely discussed—eh! Miss Mary?—but although lovers—like ostriches—fancy that in hiding their heads they escape notice altogether, still suspicions *will* arise—the world *will* talk!—And why not?—What can be more honourable than the marriage estate, when affording creditable prospects of worldly prosperity, and blessed by the sanction of an approving family?"

Lady Willingham looked spitefully towards

her daughter, to point out the confirmation contained in this impressive exordium to her own maternal homily of the morning. Poor Mary blushed at the implication;—she was sick of the very thoughts of Sir William Wyndham, and would gladly have dispensed with all matrimonial allusions for the remainder of her days.

Lord Lorimer, observant of these symptoms of general consciousness, and reading in them confirmation strong of his previous suspicions, now resumed his oration.

"On this point indeed—(and to you, my dear Lady Willingham, I need not scruple most unfashionably to acknowledge—on most others) Lady Lorimer and myself entertain a perfect unanimity of opinion. We are not only satisfied, but deeply anxious, that our children should settle early in life; an advantage to their permanent prospects which we are even willing to secure by personal sacrifices, and by——"

"My dear father!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, unable to repress his feelings of exultation on this most new and unexpected announcement. "My dear Sir!—This kindness adds a thousand-fold to all our former obligations towards my mother and yourself."

Lord Lorimer tried to muster a little emotion, and to appear properly affected, for he suspected that an explanation was coming; but Lady Willingham, who felt that her own hearth-rug and the presence of Mesdames Darnham and Dodderwell formed a very singular scene for the display of the domestic sensibilities of a father and son so remotely connected with the family as Lord Lorimer and Frederick, began to twitch her shawl, and evince divers symptoms of impatience. She was herself a very undemonstrative woman, and regarded a *scene* of any kind as superfluous and impertinent. But she became still more vexed and still more indignant when, on glancing a second time towards Mary, she perceived that her

blushes had given place to a death-like paleness, and that the poor girl could scarcely keep her seat. Miss Willingham had been harassed during five successive hours with every variety of trial that could assail a delicate mind and feeling heart; and even *her* moral courage—great as it was—could no longer maintain her through the struggle.

"You are ill, dear Mary," said Mr. Lorimer going towards her. "Lady Willingham, will you give me leave to open a window?—the heat of the weather—the flowers—the——"

"I believe, Frederick, we had better retire," said Lord Lorimer, looking significantly towards the mother of his future daughter-in-law. "A little crisis of this description is better consigned to female management."

Lady Willingham wishing both him and his son at Lorimer Hall, or any other remote point of the United Kingdom, bade them a hasty and sullen good bye; and when they arrived together at the foot of the stairs, Lord Lorimer

courteously invited his son to accompany him in his low elderly phaeton as far as the House of Commons; where the hopeful head of the family was to plead the cause of his constituents, in an explosion of preconcerted verbosity, extremely well calculated to pair off the house into the respectful silence of solitude.

"My dear father," exclaimed Frederick, as they rounded the corner of Charles-street, "how shall I express my gratitude for what has fallen from your lips this morning; or my surprise that you should have so quickly penetrated my sentiments!"

"Old heads, Fred.!—old heads"—

—"Are not often connected, Sir, with so much disinterested warmth of heart. I had apprehended that nothing would be more displeasing to you than the prospect of my marriage so early in life."

"The respectability of the Willingham family, and the rare merits of the young lady you have selected, form a strong argument in your favour."

"In point of fortune, however, my dear father—"

"Frederick! I never was esteemed a mercenary man;—fortune is, in my opinion, a very secondary consideration, when compared with birth and moral character. Of course, I shall immediately relinquish my Leyden plan;—you must get through the university with as little delay as possible;—and I have no doubt Sir Joseph will set every thing straight by presenting you to the living of Heddeston."

"I wish I had any reason to hope, Sir, that this would be the case; but I suspect that very little real cordiality subsists between him and Lady Maria."

"*Lady Maria!*—and why should he consult that silly woman about his church preferment! Let her content herself with marrying her own vain, frivolous, fine-lady daughters, without interfering in the disposal of his."

Mr. Lorimer was thoroughly mystified; but it was only for a moment. He scarcely dared,

however, stammer forth his preface to an explanation.

"I fear, my Lord, some fatal misunderstanding exists between us on this subject."

"I think not, Fred.," replied his Lordship, with a self-complacent smile, clumsily touching his wheeler on the flank. "I am not much in the habit of being mistaken in my personal conjectures. I have long seen that you were desperately in love."

"I do not deny it, Sir."

"With my respectable friend, Mr. Joseph Willingham's amiable daughter."

"With *Mary* Willingham, my Lord?—Good God!—how unfortunate!—What can have possessed you with such a mistaken—such a fatal idea?"

"*Who* then, Mr. Frederick Lorimer, if I may presume to ask—who is the *real* object honoured by your flattering preference?" said his Lordship, with dawning consciousness.

"My dear father—pray excuse me from disclosing her name just now."

"Upon my word, Sir!"—

"Yet what have I to hope from delay?—You assure me that fortune is a minor consideration;—that birth—that virtue—"

"Damn it, Sir! speak out—what is the girl's name?—who the devil is she?"

"Lady Maria Willingham's second daughter!" replied Frederick, in accents of despair.

"*Eleanor Willingham!!*" shouted Lord Lorimer, in a tone of indignation; "a beggar, by all that is horrible."

END OF VOL. I.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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